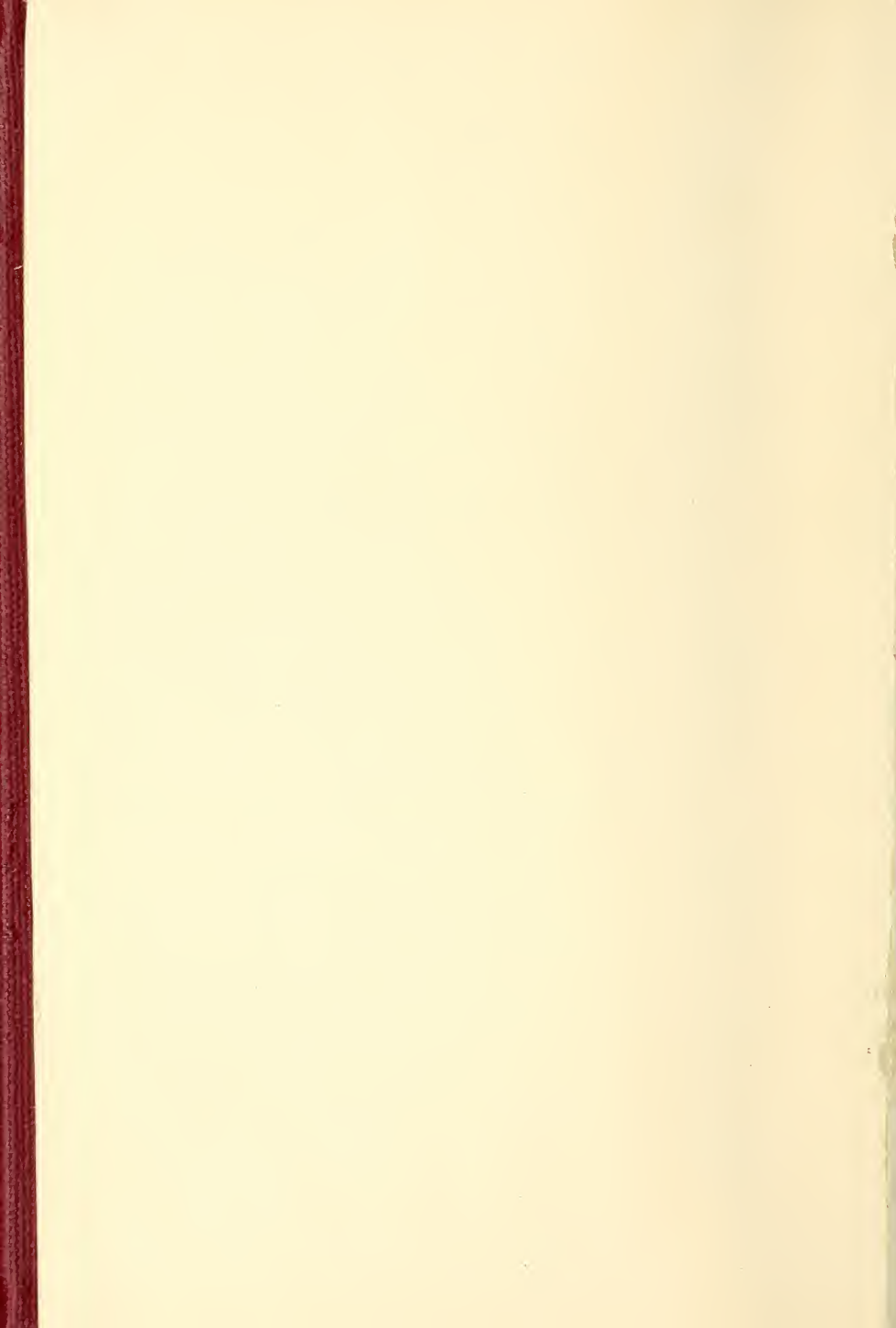


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NOTES ON THE CONSTITUTION

R. C. A.

D. D. DEMAREST



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NOTES ON THE CONSTITUTION

—OF THE—

REFORMED (DUTCH) CHURCH IN AMERICA.

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—AT—

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✓ —BY—

REV. DAVID D. DEMAREST, D.D., LL.D.

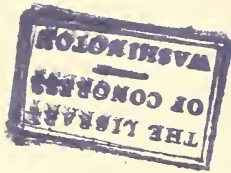
Professor of Pastoral Theology and Sacred Rhetoric.

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Notes on the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America.

PRELIMINARIES.

I. THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

This is acknowledged to be supreme in the domains of church order and worship as well as of doctrine.

Our position is well stated in the Confession of Faith, Article VII.

“We believe that these Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: *Nay, though it were an angel from heaven*, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since it is forbidden, *to add unto or take away anything from the word of God*, it doth thereby evidently appear, that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither may we compare any

writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to compare custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times or persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore, we reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, *Try the spirits whether they are of God: likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.*"

II. CONFESSIONS, CREEDS, CONSTITUTIONS.

These are the work of man and have their uses and abuses.

1. It is claimed that these ought to be in accordance with the word of God, and that they must always be tested by that word.

2. They vary because of various interpretations of the word, and also because of unscriptural additions sometimes made by ecclesiastical authority, as in case of the Tridentine decrees. Hence some creeds affirm what others deny.

3. All men of religious convictions have them, even those who denounce them. They may be unwritten and subscription not be required, yet they necessarily exist. Every man who believes anything has a creed.

4. Beliefs agreed on by a number of Christians constitute their common creed, which is useful as a bond of

visible fellowship, as promotive of mutual edification, and as a basis of coöperative action in advancing the Kingdom of God.

5. Our Reformed Church holds that her creeds, confessions and constitutions are human productions, presenting what are believed to be the teachings of Scripture in systematic forms and connections, to be imposed on no one, but to be voluntarily and intelligently received by those who are thus able to receive them; to be held in subordination to the word of God, and liable to be tried by the law and testimony as the only authoritative and infallible standard.

They are abused when they are exalted to authority coördinate with the word of God, and when they are imposed on the consciences of men.

This position is clearly defined in the Confession of Faith, Art. XXXII. :

“In the mean time we believe, though it is useful and beneficial, that those who are rulers of the Church, institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church; yet they ought studiously to take care, that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only master, hath instituted. And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience, in any manner whatever. Therefore we admit only of that, which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God. For this purpose, excommunication or church

discipline is requisite, with the several circumstances belonging to it, according to the word of God."

III. NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS.

We have in the New Testament the doctrines of Christianity and the general principles of worship and of church order, but we do not have a system of theology, nor a ritual prescribing ceremonies, nor an ecclesiastical constitution containing rules of government in detail.

We have the general laws that all things be done to edification, and that all things be done decently and in order. (1 Cor. xiv. 26:40.)

This implies the right of a Christian community to adopt a system of doctrine that it deems to be scriptural, such modes and forms of worship as shall be for edification, and such rules of government and order as shall be promotive of the peace, prosperity and efficiency of Christians formed into a visible, organized society; it being always understood that what God has commanded is not to be set aside, and that what He has forbidden is not to be approved or ^{re}sactioned. Within these limits there is liberty.

This view is well expressed in the Westminster Confession, Ch. I. Sec. 6, which says "that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed."

Prof. Archibald A. Hodge in commenting on this section says: "They [the Scriptures] do not descend in practical matters into details, but laying down general principles, leave men to apply them, in the exercise of their natural judgment, in the light of experience and in adaptation to changing circumstances, as they are guided by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit."*

No less explicit is Article 20 of the Protestant Episcopal Church, which says:

"The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies and authority in controversies of faith; and yet it is not lawful for the church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written."

IV. THE IDEA OF THE CHURCH.

1. *The Holy Catholic or Universal Church.*

In the Apostles' Creed we confess our belief in "The Holy Catholic Church."

This church is invisible; that is, not known to the world as a visible organization with laws, officers, ceremonies, etc. Its members are infallibly known only to the Searcher of hearts.

It is described in the Heidelberg Catechism in answer to Question 54.

"QUES. *What believest thou concerning the 'Holy Catholic Church' of Christ?*

"ANS. That the Son of God from the beginning to the

* Commentary on the Confession of Faith, page 62.

end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a Church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof."

Also in the Confession of Faith, Art. 27:

"We believe and confess one catholic or universal Church, which is an holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost. This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which, without subjects, cannot be. And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appear very small, and in the eyes of men, to be reduced to nothing: as during the perilous reign of Ahab, *the Lord reserved unto him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal*. Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit."

In agreement with this is the language of the Westminster Confession, Chap. XXV., Sec. 1:

"The Catholic or Universal Church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the

Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

These members of the body of Christ, adults and infants, are the kletoi or eklectoi of scripture, and constitute *the Church or Ecclesia of Scripture*.

To this collective body of all who are joined to Christ and only to them are the promises of the Gospel made. (1 Tim. iii. 15; Eph. i. 22:23; Rev. xxi. 2:9; Mat. xvi. 18.)

2. *The Catholic Church visible.*

The members of the Holy Catholic Church cannot but manifest themselves to the world, as loyal subjects of Christ, witnesses for him and followers after holiness. They are the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the city set upon a hill that cannot be hid. (Mat. v. 14.) Associated with these as members of the visible Catholic Church are hypocrites and self deceivers. The tares grow together with the wheat.

This church is described in the Westminster Confession Ch. XXV. Sec. 2 and 3.

"The visible church which is also Catholic or Universal under the gospel, not confined to one nation as before under the law, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."

"Unto this Catholic visible church, Christ hath given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God, for the

gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life to the end of the world; and doth by His own presence and spirit, according to His promise make them effectual thereunto."

Our Confession of Faith says in Article XXIX. :

"The marks by which the true Church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected; and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church. As for the false church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances, than to the word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments, as appointed by Christ in his word, but adds to and takes from them, as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those, who live holily according to the word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness and idolatry. These two churches are easily known and distinguished from each other."

In Article XIX. of the Articles of religion of the Protestant Episcopal Church we read:

"The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly ministered ac-

cording to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."

While the invisible and visible churches might in these statements have been more sharply distinguished, yet certainly it is not declared in them that all professing Christians in the world are to be embraced in one visible organization. The Roman Catholics say that there is no church invisible, that visibility in the form of outward organization is essential to the being of the "Holy Catholic Church"; that the church must have unity, that this unity is found only in the headship of the Pope who is Christ's vice-gerent on earth, and that therefore if anyone is saved, who is not in communion with Rome, he is saved, not as a member of Christ's church, but by an act of special grace.

More reasonable and more scriptural is the view that the Catholic church visible has no external, all comprehensive organization, that its members are found in all ecclesiastical organizations, that not a few are found outside of them all, that the church visible is not an aggregate of all the ecclesiastical organizations in the world, but the aggregate of all nominal individual Christians irrespective of church connections. It is the universal Christian community to which the name *ecclesia*, or church has been given, though not by the New Testament. Much misconception and misunderstanding would have been avoided, if some other term could have been found to designate this universal Christian community.

III. LOCAL CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES.

True believers are not only members of Christ but of one another. There is a communion of saints. They are of one spirit. Hence they are drawn to each other and there is a strong tendency to come together to pray to, and praise their common Lord and to edify one another. Assemblies convened for such purposes were called churches, *ecclesie*.

We read of the church in the house of Nymphas, (Col. iv. 15), of the church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor. xvi. 19), in the house of Philemon (v. 2). Also of the seven churches in Asia, the churches in Judea and Samaria, the church of the Thessalonians. Informal gatherings of Christians for worship may in the first days after Pentecost have been called churches; nevertheless organizations were soon effected. Paul and Barnabas in their missionary journey ordained elders in every church. (Acts xiv. 23.)

This was a matter of necessity. Religious societies cannot, any more than other societies, exist without government, involving laws and officers to administer them. Naturally, the first Christians adopted the constitution found ready to their hand in the Jewish synagogue, which was ruled by elders.

We do not, however, consider the organization of groups of disciples to have been a matter of expediency only, or as coming in the way of natural development. It had a divine origin. It is true that Christ did not organize his followers in this manner when he was on

the earth, nor did he give special directions about it. But he has in the epistles through his inspired apostles taught us that there must be order and law in the churches, officers to rule, and power even to exclude unworthy members from membership. (1 Cor. v. 5:13.)

IV. DENOMINATIONS.

As Christian fellowship extends beyond the bounds of the local church, so also does church fellowship. Many individual churches associate together and so form what is called a denomination of Christians. These are very numerous, differing in many ways, in their views of Christian truth, in modes of worship, in forms of government, and in customs and usages. To a denomination of affiliated churches a constitution is a necessity, especially if there be a supreme body and subordinate bodies and graded courts of appeal. In order to work together there must be one constitution accepted and submitted to by all.

It would have been well if these denominations had always been called by that name and never been known as churches. It would be correct and every way better to say the Roman Catholic denomination, the Greek, the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, the Baptist, the Methodist, etc., denominations.

V. DEFINITION OF A CONSTITUTION.

We now understand that an ecclesiastical constitution consists of such rules and regulations as have been

by an individual church or a denomination adopted after due deliberation, for the most efficient application of the great principles of order found in the word of God, for the promotion of the edification of believers, for the work of maintaining, defending and propagating the Gospel, for training disciples for Christ, for the watch and care and salutary discipline of members, and for attaining all the ends of a visible society organized in the interest of the Kingdom of God. It is enough if these rules and regulations be in accordance with, or at least, not opposed to Holy Scripture in its letter or spirit.

The term Constitution is among us used in a large and also in a restricted sense.

The large sense is expressed in the preface to the Constitution of 1793, as follows:

“To the Constitution of a church appertain its Doctrines, mode of Worship and Government. When these are known, its true and distinguishing character is sufficiently ascertained.”

In the restricted sense the term constitution is confined to the Rules of Government. It is with the constitution in this restricted sense that we are occupied in this study.

VI. LOYALTY TO THE CONSTITUTION.

1. The obligation to do whatever is required by the word of God and to leave undone every thing that is forbidden will not be disputed by any one who admits that the authority of Holy Scripture is supreme.

2. Many, however, will plead that the case is different when you speak of the obligation to a loyal observance of constitutional requirements. For a constitution, say they, is a human work and imperfect, no matter how excellent, and some provisions are not wise, nor expedient, nor for edification.

One man approves of a provision which another disapproves. A man also may change his opinions and believe that what was once in his view a wise and good provision has outlived its usefulness. Why then should not a man, and especially, a minister of a congregation make practical amendments to suit himself and his people? Why should he not omit some requirement, if he feels satisfied that he can do better for his people by such omission? Is the constitution a peculiarly sacred thing? Is it not intended to promote edification, and why should it not be made to yield in the interest of edification? Why should loyalty to it be accounted a very serious matter, or one be brought to account for disloyalty? Is it not enough for a man to say, "Since I do not find this or that constitutional requirement divinely ordered nor approved by my judgment, I will not respect it, but will do that which is right in my own eyes, holding myself accountable to God only."

It will readily be seen that if such a position be allowed, a constitution becomes utterly valueless. Every provision in it can be set aside. The objection that some things are not found in Scripture is not to the point; for it is not the province of a constitution to reaffirm enactments of Scripture. It is occupied with mat-

ters that are confessedly extra-scriptural, indifferent and intended to secure good order and edification, and which are judged to be wise by the collective wisdom of the denomination. While no man can be required to approve anything that does not commend itself to his judgment, he can yet in practice yield his private judgment in such case, and it is by no means to his credit to refuse to do this. The surrender of private judgment as to actions, but not as to opinions, is essential to the practical usefulness of a constitution.

3. It may be objected that there is an infringement of liberty in our position. This is not the case. The constitution is a contract to which no man is compelled to become a party. In that matter he has perfect liberty. But having become party to the contract, he has no right or liberty to treat it as a thing of nought, by neglect of its requirements. He is no longer free, because he is bound by his own voluntary act. This makes a violation of the constitution a serious matter. It is a breach of faith with our neighbor; it is a transgression of a plain command of God's word, "Lie not one to another."

We are accustomed to the doctrine that regard for state and national constitutions, and for legislative acts is a religious duty; shall we not then claim the same for the ecclesiastical laws to which we have expressly pledged our submission? Is it not a violation of religious obligation even when some provision of not much importance in itself is ignored?

According to the Compendium every one who makes

confession of his faith is to be asked whether he will submit himself to the Christian discipline, which means to the government of the church as defined in its rules. Every minister on accepting a call, promises to remain, as well as the congregation, subordinate to what are called "the excellent rules and Constitution of our Reformed (Dutch) Church."

The same thing is true of the various ecclesiastical bodies, the Consistory, the Classis, the Particular Synod and the General Synod. They all are constitutional bodies, having their rights, duties and prerogatives defined by the constitution, and all are bound by it as fully as the humblest church member. The General Synod has only the powers given to it by the constitution.

VII. FAMILIARITY WITH THE CONSTITUTION.

1. Such familiarity is important and desirable,

a. For all members of the church, for all have their rights and duties under it. It is their defense and shield against unjust and tyrannical treatment by ecclesiastical authorities, or by fellow members.

b. Especially for all male members, for they are liable at some time to be called to hold office, and to rule under and in accordance with the constitution and they should therefore be familiar with it. Those who are in authority in civil affairs are presumed to understand the laws which they are called to administer. It is reckoned a shame to them if they are found to be ignor-

ant of them, and much more if they glory in their ignorance. Is not the same true in ecclesiastical affairs?

Minister, elders and deacons, all belong to the consistory, the prerogatives of which body are defined by the constitution.

A minister always, an elder sometimes, is a member of the Classis whose prerogatives also are defined by the constitution. The same is also true of the Particular and the General Synods. It follows that every minister and every elder should be familiar with the document that he is required to apply, and in accordance with which he is to give judgment in cases and matters more or less serious.

c. This should be made a matter of conscience. It is true that some members of our ecclesiastical bodies avow that they have no taste for the study of rules and methods, and without shame avow contempt for them. Yet they vote, and that on important questions, the merits of which depend solely on constitutional interpretation. Men who are above such trifles as ecclesiastical laws, and who are wholly occupied with weightier things should modestly take back seats, and be silent when the question is about the application of such laws. Most of the questions debated in ecclesiastical assemblies are of that character. It is impertinent for a man to say impliedly, My judgment is thus or so; if the constitution of which I confess ignorance agrees with this, very well; if not, so much the worse for the constitution.

2. The knowledge that is so desirable is very practi-

cable. It is easily obtained. The rules of government are contained in a very small book, which is easily procured, and its arrangement and style are clear. Every pastor should see to it that there is a copy in the hands of every elder and deacon in his consistory and that the book is extensively circulated in his congregation. Why might not a meeting of consistory be occasionally held exclusively for its study? Why might not the pastor expound it in his Bible class or at the weekly meetings of members or at other times? The existing deplorable ignorance ought to be removed.

VIII. INTERPRETATION OF THE CONSTITUTION.

1. Have we in any officer or court an authorized interpreter to which we may refer a doubtful point and get an explanation that shall settle it without appeal? Or is every one obliged to interpret for himself, exercising the right of private judgment, just as he does in the study of the word of God? When one would satisfy himself about the meaning of a passage in the word of God, he does not go directly to some scholar, divine, or church court, and accept unquestioningly what he is told; that is, he ought not to do so. Popes, Fathers, Councils, Synods cannot interpret scripture authoritatively for him, but he must get all the light he can and pray for light from God, and so decide. So in regard to a doubtful constitutional question; he must get all the light on it that he can and then accept the responsibility of determining and acting for himself. Why not?

May he not be able to understand the constitution itself quite as easily as an offered interpretation?

But it may be claimed that the General Synod, which is the highest of our judicatures, and which represents the whole church, must be such an authoritative interpreter of the rules of government. We say No—the General Synod is the creature of the constitution, and has no powers but those given to it by this instrument, and we do not find this authority of interpretation among them. The Synod is not a standing tribunal to which constitutional provisions may be referred abstractly, or *in thesi* for authoritative explanation.

Yet it is a court of final appeal, and in the review of cases that come before it regularly, it is often obliged to interpret constitutional questions as they pertain to the cases under review. The decisions in such cases are valid and final; no appeal can be taken from them, and they have such authority as may be claimed for precedents. The functions of the General Synod are in this respect analogous to those of the Supreme Court of the United States, which never gives a decision on any constitutional question *in thesi*, but only as it is connected with some case before it. It would never listen to a petition for an interpretation without a case, no matter from what source it should come.

Suppose that a minister has done some act which some of his brethren deem to be unconstitutional. Is it competent for the classis to say, We will not take up and decide this case, but will petition the General Synod to interpret for us the article in dispute, and so the

matter will be determined and we be at the same time relieved from vexatious proceedings. The Synod cannot comply with such request. The classis must accept its own responsibility as an interpreter of the constitution in the case and for the time. If the brother be justified in his course, the matter ends there, unless a dissenting minority complain and carry the matter up to the synods. Or his course may be disapproved and he be censured. It is then his right to carry up his case by appeal until it reaches the General Synod, when the judgment of that body will be given, necessarily embracing its view of the provision of the constitution that is in question.

The view of some that the General Synod has very large independent powers, and is well nigh omnipotent in church affairs, is unwarranted and full of danger. Jealously guard the rights of the lower bodies and of the membership of the churches. The General Synod is not supreme; it is not the fountain of church power. It has not the functions of the consistory or the classis. It cannot originate a case of discipline except of a professor of theology, who is made directly amenable to the synod by the constitution. A classis once asked the synod to interpret for it the section of the constitution that requires the pulpit explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism. The General Synod inadvertently, doubtless, complied and the result was an interpretation less clear and simple, less broad and liberal, and less careful of the individual liberty of the pastor than the constitution itself. The synod should have dismissed the

overture on the ground that it was not within its province to give an interpretation.

2. What are some principles of interpretation?

a. Do not try to make a section conform to preconceived notions or prejudices, and do not give undue weight to your own opinion about the wisdom, reasonableness or expediency of the section under consideration. The object is not to declare what *ought* to be and therefore *must* be the meaning, but to ascertain what it *is*, what was intended by the framers and adopters, whether it be wise or unwise.

b. A candid study of words and the construction of sentences should be made.

c. The context should be studied, and a section be interpreted by the light of what precedes and what follows.

d. A section should be compared with other parts of the constitution that relate to the same subject.

e. Positive directions always imply the prohibition of the opposite.

f. Reserved powers pertain only to things not treated of at all in the constitution.

g. Great weight is to be given to historical testimony bearing on the interpretation which was given and has been followed from the beginning on. We do not seek to learn what meaning *may* be obtained from the language, but what has the church always believed to be the meaning.

Hence in the case of the Riddsdale judgment, 1877, in England, the principle was thus stated: "Where the

meaning of a statute is *doubtful*, the construction put upon it by contemporaneous and long-continued usage ought not to be disturbed.”*

Justice Story in his commentary on the constitution of the United States, in the chapter on the rules of interpretation, and quoting as authority “Rutherforth’s Institutes of National Law,” says: “Light may also be obtained in such cases from contemporary facts or expositions, from antecedent mischiefs, from known habits, manners and institutions, and from other sources almost innumerable, which may justly affect the judgment in drawing a fit conclusion in the particular case.” “Much also may be gathered from contemporary history and contemporary interpretation, to aid us in just conclusions.”

In a footnote he says: “The value of contemporary interpretation is much insisted on by the Supreme Court.”

Interpreters of the constitution of the United States have a great advantage in the possession of the published debates in the convention that framed the constitution. These can always be referred to whenever there is a controverted point of construction of the instrument.

It is to be regretted that no record has come down to us of the debates held in connection with the formation of our ecclesiastical constitution.

* London Quarterly, July, 1877.

IX. HISTORY OF THE CONSTITUTION.

Our ecclesiastical constitution is a growth of centuries dating from the times of the Reformation. The evangelical doctrines were received in the Netherlands very early and with enthusiasm. On account of their dreadful persecutions under the Spanish tyranny, the people were obliged to worship secretly. Yearning for Christian fellowship they organized themselves into local, independent churches after the Genevan Presbyterian model, which were called "Churches sitting under the Cross." The union of these in one general organization was, at the time, impossible. At last the people took courage and on the third of November, 1568, a synod was convened at Wesel on the Rhine which was outside of the Netherlands, but notable as a city of refuge to which the persecuted from all parts were made welcome. About twenty churches were represented in this synod and fifty-three persons signed the proceedings, the name of Petrus Dathenus heading the list, presumably as president. In this synod, the Dutch of the Seven Provinces and the Walloons of Southern Netherlands or Belgium, who used the French language, came together. They agreed on rules of church government and order which form the germ of our present constitution. The acts of this synod were avowedly provisional, and to be reviewed by subsequent synods.

The next synod was held in Embden, a city of East Friesland, also outside of the Netherlands, but in which there was a large church of Dutch refugees. This synod

revised and made additions to the Acts of the Synod of Wesel. Revisions were subsequently made by synods held at Dordrecht in 1574 and 1578, at Middleburg in 1581, at the Hague in 1586, and finally by the National Synod of Dordrecht in 1619.*

The Synod of Dordrecht was called for the purpose of examining the doctrines of the Remonstrants and it was an ecumenical council of the Reformed churches, for many delegates from the other countries of Europe were present and took part in the proceedings. After the foreign delegates had retired, those from the churches of the Netherlands remained to consider the affairs of these churches. They occupied themselves mainly with a revision of the Rules of Church Government, of the Confession of Faith, the Catechism and the Liturgy. Their proceedings are known as the Post-Acta of the Synod of Dort.

The colonization of New Netherland was made about this time and the colonists brought with them the "Rules of Government" of the Synod of Dort. The churches that were established in this country, being under the care of the Classis of Amsterdam, were governed by these rules exclusively for a period of 164 years, down to 1792.

In 1771 the controversy between the progressive and conservative parties known as the Cœtus and Conferentie, which had greatly disturbed the churches, was happily settled. In a general convention held in New York

* Hansen's Reformed Church in the Netherlands.
Rutgers Acta Nederlandische Synoden.

in the month of October a "Plan of Union" was adopted, which was approved by the ecclesiastical authorities in the Netherlands, whereby the independence of the churches in America was substantially secured. In the Articles of Union the members of the convention declared their "firm adherence to the ecclesiastical ordinances aforesaid, etc." For twenty years longer the rules of the Synod of Dort continued to be the rules of government of our American churches.

Toward the close of the century the English language was making such inroads on the Dutch that in 1788 it was resolved by the Synod that the standards of doctrine and rules of order should be prepared for publication in the English language, and a very able committee, with Dr. J. H. Livingston at its head, was appointed to perform this work. Great care and much labor were bestowed on it; it grew in their hands and progress was reported to every successive Synod until in October, 1792, its completion was reported, and it was ordered to be committed to the press. In 1793 it was reported that this had been done, and in 1794 the Synod expressed its gratification that the church order was finally completed and was, in general, cordially received in the Dutch churches. In order to ascertain the mind of the churches *all* the ministers, with an elder from every church, were invited to meet with the Synod in October, 1791, while the work was in progress, so that the Synod might be able to avail themselves of the presence and counsel of the *whole* body of ministers in issuing their Ecclesiastical Constitution. The book published in

1793 contains the Confession of Faith, Heidelberg Catechism, Compendium, Liturgy, Canons of Dordrecht, Rules of Church Government, and Explanatory Articles, and it is called "The Constitution of the Reformed Dutch Church in the United States of America."

The explanatory articles, seventy-three in number, were intended to explain in what manner the Rules of Dordrecht were to be executed consistently with the local circumstances of the churches in this country. The explanations in these articles were declared to be and were accepted as authoritative, or part of the organic law of the church.

Thus were the Reformed Dutch churches in America organized into a denomination, having for its organic law the rules of government of the Synod of Dort and the explanatory articles.

In 1815 a book was published containing these rules and explanatory articles with an appendix comprising the standing resolutions adopted by the General Synod at various times from 1794 to 1815.

In 1831 the General Synod appointed a committee to "revise and amend the explanatory articles of church government, the appendix, together with the resolutions in relation to the government of the church, passed by the General Synod at different periods, in conformity with the principles contained in the original rules of church government adopted at the National Synod of Dort, 1618-19." The distinguished elder, the Hon. Peter D. Vroom, of New Jersey, was the chairman of this committee, which reported the constitution in its

present form of arrangement as a single document, being the result of their revising and amending work. It was accepted by the Synod, approved by the Classes, and it was declared by the Synod of 1833 that it "shall henceforth be taken and received as the constitution of the said church." (Acts of General Synod, Vol. iv. p. 203.)

A subsequent revision has been made which was in 1874, declared to be thenceforth the Constitution. The history of the past reviewed by us is not only interesting but useful as throwing light on the organic law of the present. Changes have been called for by changed times and circumstances. Amendments have since been made, and doubtless will be made in the future.

INTRODUCTION.

FOR the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ, it is necessary there should be certain *Offices* and *Assemblies*, and a strict attention to *Doctrines*, *Sacraments*, *Usages* and *Christian Discipline*; of all which the following ecclesiastical ordinances particularly treat.

The object of "Ecclesiastical ordinances" is the "maintenance of order in the Church of Christ."

The following paragraphs are from the introduction, freely translated, to the Acts of the Synod of Wesel, 1568.

"Certain chapters and sections which the ministers of the churches of the Netherlands have judged to be

partly *necessary* and partly *useful* for the benefit of these churches.”

“The Apostle Paul enjoins that in the church of God, all things shall be done decently and in order. Therefore the churches should not only agree in doctrine, but also in government and polity. In order that the same system may be followed by all the churches in the Netherlands it has seemed good to us, to put in order the following articles, after consultation with the best of the Reformed Churches, to be subscribed and observed by all the ministers for the benefit of the church.”

To the Acta of the Synod of Embden, 1571, and of the Synods of Dordrecht, 1574 and 1578, no introductions are prefixed.

The introduction as we now have it, standing at the head of our present constitution appears for the first time at the head of the Acta of the Synod of Middleburgh, 1581. It was repeated by the Synods of the Hague, 1586, and the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-19.

ARTICLE I.

OF THE OFFICES IN THE CHURCH.

SEC. 1. The Offices in the Church are fourfold, viz:

1. The Office of Ministers of the Word.
2. The Office of Teachers of Theology.
3. The Office of Elders.
4. The Office of Deacons.

The first, third and fourth of the offices named are

scriptural offices. Our church has under the law of edification created the special office of teachers of theology. It commits the task of preparing candidates for the ministry to men specially appointed by our highest ecclesiastical authority instead of allowing ordinary ministers to do this work. It has been done by the latter in some cases under exceptional, extraordinary circumstances.

In the early period of the history of our churches in America, before they had a professor of theology, J. Frelinghuysen, Goetschius and Dorstius prepared a few candidates for the ministry.

The first act of the Synod of Wesel was in the form of a declaration that it was necessary for the welfare of the churches that they should have ministers who were pious, learned and well-versed in Sacred Scripture; that to this end they should have a knowledge of the languages, and be trained by constant exercises in the explanation of Scripture. It was added that special pains should be taken to establish colleges in which the three chief languages should be taught, and the necessary training be carried on.

From the principle maintained so early, our branch of the Reformed Church has never departed.

ARTICLE II.

OF THE MINISTERS OF THE WORD.

SEC. 1. No person shall be allowed to exercise the office of a minister, without being thereinto regularly inducted, according to the word of God, and the order established by the Church.

This is in accordance with a principle that is essential in the government and even to the continued existence of any organized society. No man can thrust himself into an office; nor can he be put in by others except in the way prescribed by the laws of the society.

Every church belonging to a denomination of Christians is bound by the laws whereby the whole denomination is governed; consequently a congregation may not act independently in calling and inducting a pastor. The laws of the denomination that regulate everything pertaining to the "exercise of the office of a minister" must be complied with.

A layman speaking words of exhortation, by invitation or not, does not exercise the office of a minister, as the phrase is to be understood in this section.

Nor is preaching by students of our theological schools to be regarded otherwise than as a seminary exercise allowed by the General Synod, which authorizes professors to permit students to preach in our congregations under certain restrictions.

SEC. 2. Every person contemplating the work of the ministry, before he commences his course of Theological studies, shall furnish satisfactory evidence of his being a member, in full communion and in good standing, of a Reformed Protestant Church; of his piety, abilities and literary attainments; and thereupon shall be admitted into one of the Theological Schools; and, during the prosecution of his studies there, shall be subject to the rules and regulations thereof; and when he shall have completed the prescribed course and term of Theological studies, shall be admitted to an examination

according to the regulations of the schools, as established by the General Synod; and, if found qualified, shall receive a professorial certificate to that effect, which shall entitle him to an examination for licensure before the Classis to which he belongs.

Sections 2 to 6 inclusive are connected, interdependent, and any one of them must be interpreted in accordance with its relation to the others. They state the conditions, not for licensure only, but for *admission* to an *examination* for licensure by a classis.

Section 2 is not a rule for the students of the theological schools under the care of the General Synod. It is a part of the organic law of the church; the rules for the government of the schools are found elsewhere.

This section is operative in the case of one who has not yet become a student of theology. "Every person *contemplating* the work of the ministry, *shall*," it is said, "be *admitted* into one of the theological schools." The schools referred to are the three established by, and which are under the care of the General Synod, one at New Brunswick, one at Holland, Mich., and a third at Arcot, India. This is proved by the fact that when the western school was established, this section was amended by substituting the words, "*one* of the theological schools," for the words, "*the* theological school." Also, by the requirement that the final examination shall be "according to the regulations of the schools as established by the General Synod."

The following requirements are found in this section:

1. Proof of membership and good standing in a

Reformed Protestant church. This is made by the presentation of a certificate of church membership.

2. Evidence of piety, given by testimonials and personal examination.

3. Evidence of abilities and literary attainments, given by presentation of a college diploma, satisfactory certificates or examination.

4. Admission to the school and subjection to its rules and regulations.

5. Final examination at the end of the prescribed course.

6. Professorial certificate received which *entitles* one to an examination for licensure by the classis.

NOTE. The theological schools are open for the admission of students from all denominations of Christians. These, having received certificates of the work done by them, seek licensure from the ecclesiastical bodies to which they belong. Or if already licensed or ordained, are made welcome to the privileges of the schools.

SEC. 3. In the examination, strict attention shall be paid to the attainments of the student, not only in the original languages of the Sacred Scriptures, in Biblical literature, in composition, and his method of sermonizing, but he shall be especially examined respecting his knowledge of Theology, his orthodoxy, his piety, and his views in desiring to become a preacher of the Gospel.

The branches of study on which the applicant for licensure is examined by the classis are selected from among those which he has pursued in the theological

school. Others are added when he is examined for ordination. If he has been excused by the General Synod from attention to any particular study he, of course, cannot be examined on it.

The classes are not required as are the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian denomination to examine candidates for licensure on classical, scientific or literary subjects.

SEC. 4. Whoever, upon examination, shall be approved by the Classis, must, before he is licensed, attest his adherence to the doctrines of the Gospel, by subscribing the following formula, viz:

We, the underwritten, testify, that the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Confession of the Netherland churches, as also the Canons of the National Synod of Dordrecht, held in the years 1618 and 1619, are fully conformable to the Word of God. We promise, moreover, that, as far as we are able, we will, with all faithfulness, teach and defend, both in public and private, the doctrines established in the standards aforesaid. And, should ever any part of these doctrines appear to us dubious, we will not divulge the same to the people, nor disturb the peace of the Church, or of any community; but will communicate our sentiments to the ecclesiastical judicatories under which we stand, and subject ourselves to the counsel and sentence of the same.

Connecting this section with the preceding one, the word "whoever" must be restricted to those who have been admitted to an examination by the way described, that is, on a professorial certificate from one of our

theological schools, or by dispensation from such certificate granted by the General Synod, which method is treated of in a subsequent section. There is no hint of an independent authority in a classis to admit one to an examination under any other conditions.

The formula of subscription contains:

1. A declaration of belief that the standards of doctrine are fully conformable to the word of God. This does not imply a belief

a. That the standards of doctrine are coördinate with the word of God as original sources of truth. Nor

b. That they contain all the truths of revelation, or the whole of any one truth. Nor

c. That they are always expressed in the very best way.

d. Nor that interpretations of any doctrine though currently received are endorsed by the act of subscription.

2. An engagement to teach and defend the doctrines contained in the standards.

3. Treatment of doubts.

a. Not to be publicly divulged and thus the peace of the church be disturbed.

b. To be made known to the ecclesiastical authorities.

c. To submit to their counsel and sentence.

The subject of subscriptions presents some practical difficulties which cannot here be considered. But it must be understood that subscription is a voluntary act, and that no man should subscribe this or any other formula without having carefully examined and con-

sidered the doctrines to be subscribed to. A good conscience must be maintained, and the subscription be without mental reservations. Subscription that is merely formal and not *ex animo* is dishonest and demoralizing. If a man has scruples let him make them known to the classis *in limine*. He may be sure that they will receive due and even generous consideration. The leaning will ever be to the side of charity.

SEC. 5. After subscribing the aforesaid formula, the candidate shall be entitled to a certificate, or testimonial, signed by the president of the Classis before which the examination is held, containing a license to preach the Gospel; which license may, for cause, be revoked by the Classis."

The form of the license to preach the Gospel may be found in the Appendix.

The license may for cause be revoked by the classis.

1. The person licensed may become convinced that he has not been called of God to the ministry of the word. He may, as has been done in some instances, ask the classis to revoke his license.

2. He may fail to receive a call within a reasonable time, or he may preach strange doctrines, or his walk and conversation may be so unbecoming that the classis feels justified in withdrawing his license if not compelled to. In such a case no judicial proceedings are necessary. Though licensed to preach by the classis, the candidate remains a private member of a local church until he has been ordained. The board of elders

of that church is the court to try him on charges of immorality.

The question arises whether it would not be well for a classis to grant licenses for a limited period, say one year, and require from the candidate a report of his work during the year. Then the classis might renew the license or not at its discretion.

SEC. 6. Any person of whose gifts, piety and promise of usefulness the Classis is satisfied, may be recommended by the same to the General Synod for a dispensation from any of the above requirements as to study. Such recommendation shall always be accompanied by a full statement of the reasons for the same. And no dispensation shall in any case be granted except by the General Synod, and on the recommendation of the Classis.

1. The normal method of admission to examination for licensure has been described. Learning and orthodoxy are and always have been highly valued by our denomination. Hence the conditions found in section 2 of a full course and term of theological studies in one of our own theological schools.

2. Yet it is believed and admitted that men who cannot meet these conditions may be called of God to the ministry, and that therefore the way to it ought to be opened to them. At the same time the way should be carefully guarded and great caution be exercised in excusing persons from any of these conditions. Hence both the classis and the General Synod are made responsible, the one for recommending and the other for

granting dispensations. This is not a new feature in our polity, nor a modern device created by the pressure of the times.

In the Rules of Church Government of Dort we have the following article:

“Schoolmasters, mechanics and others who have not regularly studied shall not be admitted to the office of the ministry unless the best assurance be obtained of their singular talents, piety, humility, sobriety, good understanding and discretion, together with the gifts of utterance. Whenever, therefore, such persons offer themselves for the ministry, the classis having first obtained the approval of synod, shall previously examine them; and according to their proficiency shall enjoin a course of private exercises; after which they shall be dealt with as shall be judged most conducive to edification.” Art. 8.

This was in force not only in the Netherlands, but also in this country until the adoption of the constitution of 1833.

In the constitution of 1833 there was no provision whatever for admission to an examination for licensure except on a professorial certificate from our own theological school. The reason for dropping the ancient provision for dispensations was that at that time a very deep interest in the only existing theological school was felt throughout the whole denomination. There was a determination to build it up and to protect it. The endowments of the second and third professorships had just been completed and three professors, constituting a

full corps in those days, had been placed in office, and it was felt that the time had come for requiring from all who were seeking the ministry in the denomination that they should pursue the full course of study in this school. The call of God to those who could not do this was not recognized. It was a mistaken view that led to a mistaken policy.

It was soon found to be impossible to carry this policy into practice. Applications came which it was felt could not be denied. Hence synods frequently granted dispensations just as if the old permissory rule continued to exist. Occasionally one would object and secure a refusal on the ground of unconstitutionality. This state of things continued until 1874 when the present constitution was adopted. This sixth section was introduced so that there might be constitutional authority for doing that which synods had been doing for forty years without constitutional warrant. The principle of the rightfulness of dispensations was by this action admitted, and at the same time safeguards against abuses of it were provided.

It comes then to this, that no person can be admitted to an examination for licensure by a classis unless he has either:

1. A professorial certificate from one of our theological schools obtained in the way described in section second, or

2. A dispensation from the requirements of that section granted by the General Synod.

The classes of cases in which a dispensation is neces-

sary are few and well defined. They are confined to dispensations from what are called "the above requirements as to study," all which requirements are mentioned in section 2. No application for a dispensation from the examination required by section 3, nor from subscription required by section 4 is to be entertained. In order therefore, to be able to discriminate between necessary and unnecessary applications we must examine section 2 and ascertain what are "the above requirements as to study." It is important to do this so that the General Synod may be relieved from the task of considering and acting upon applications that the classes ought never to bring before it, the number of which has caused criticism and complaint.

The requirements mentioned pertain to

- I. The Place of study.
- II. The Term of study.
- III. The Branches of study.

I. *The Place* in which theological studies must be pursued is one of the theological schools that are under rules established by the General Synod. This condition of place is necessary for obtaining the requisite professorial certificate, without which a dispensation becomes necessary, even though one may have passed three full years in a theological seminary of another denomination. By this statement the comparative merits of theological seminaries are not brought into consideration at all, for the question is purely a constitutional one, which can be determined by an appeal to the constitution only.

II. *The Term.* The student is required to complete the prescribed term of theological studies, that is he is to continue to pursue them during three full years.

The General Synod however may grant to one a dispensation from two years or one year of study, or as has occasionally been done from the whole term of three years. Part of the time may have been spent in some other seminary, or the applicant may not have been a member of any theological seminary at all even for a year.

III. *The Branches of Study.* The requirement is to complete the course prescribed, that is to pursue all the branches demanded by the curriculum. But it has sometimes seemed well to a classis and synod that some student should be excused from the pursuit of some particular study, usually Hebrew or Greek. A dispensation has in such a case, in accordance with authority given by this section, been granted.

This classification is exhaustive of all cases of dispensation authorized by the constitution.

Dispensations also may be granted in cases described in the following rule of the Board of Education, No. 7: "Every beneficiary shall have finished a complete and regular course of collegiate study before he shall be allowed to enter the theological seminary, unless a dispensation shall have been obtained from General Synod."

This rule applies to beneficiaries only, that is to students who are actually receiving aid from the Board of Education, and who are at the time pursuing academic

or collegiate studies which they are required to complete. They are prohibited from admission to the theological school before they have completed their collegiate courses, except by permission of the General Synod. This is a wise and most excellent rule which ought always to be strictly enforced. It is difficult to see how it can be made to apply to persons who are not beneficiaries, who are not pursuing collegiate studies, and who are not seeking admission to one of the theological schools, but who have already been admitted by the proper authority and in strict accordance with the rules established by the General Synod. These rules do not require, and never have required graduation from a college as an essential though highly desirable qualification for admission into one of our theological schools, and which qualification is possessed in a vast majority of cases.

It is suggested that the language of this rule might be modified as follows, so that its meaning could not be mistaken.

Every beneficiary pursuing academic or collegiate studies shall have finished a complete and regular course of collegiate study before he shall be allowed to enter one of the theological schools; unless he shall have obtained permission from the General Synod. Or instead of General Synod say, Board of Education.

The General Synod in June, 1895, adopted the following resolutions which should command commendation and attention from all parties concerned:

1. "The Reformed Church in America should con-

tinue to maintain the historic, high standard of literary attainments in its ministry.

2. "To this end, recommendations for the exercise of the dispensing power should be made by classes only when circumstances the most extraordinary imperatively demand it."

The classes are required in the section to accompany every recommendation for a dispensation "by a full statement of the reasons for the same." This is necessary in order to secure intelligent action by the synod; for the classes have facilities for learning all about a case which the synod has not. A classis should never recommend one for a dispensation until it has learned all the facts and circumstances that bear on the case, and has satisfied itself of the worthiness and fitness of the applicant. Even if one has studied three full years in a theological school which is not under the care of the General Synod, he should not as a matter of course be recommended on that ground solely, but the classis should enquire into his reasons for having turned away from the place and course prescribed by the constitution, and into the character of the school in which he has studied; also into his "gifts, piety and promise of usefulness." Also by such examination as may be necessary to learn what have been his habits and manner of life, and whether his acquirements show that he has improved his time. A student in one of our own schools is not admitted to an examination for licensure on the ground that he has spent three years in the school, but he must pass an examination before the Board of Superintend-

ents before he can receive the professorial certificate that admits him to an examination by the classis. Why should easier terms be granted to one who seeks a dispensation which is the practical substitute for a professorial certificate? As the one is examined by the Board of Superintendents why should not the other be examined by the classis so that they may ascertain whether he is to be recommended or not? Why should special privileges be granted to him who seeks a dispensation?

If the classes should resolutely decline to recommend for a dispensation in every case in which a dispensation is not required by the rules of the General Synod; if they should be strict in examining into the merits of the cases in which the dispensation desired is needed; and if they should resolutely act without fear or favor, the number of applications and recommendations would be vastly diminished, in fact they would almost cease to perplex the General Synod at all.

Our system and rules in regard to examinations and censures differ widely from those of most of the denominations around us, notably from those of our Presbyterian brethren. All that need here be said is that we must abide by our own book, and not suffer it to be interpreted by the system or practice of any other denomination.

SEC. 7. A candidate for the ministry may not, under any pretence whatever, administer the sacraments; nor can he be a delegate to represent a church in any ecclesiastical assembly.

1. Being a layman, a candidate for the ministry who is only licensed to preach, may not any more than any other layman, administer the sacraments. This is the prerogative of an ordained minister. If an elder and a candidate should be in a company of Christians in an extraordinary state of isolation from all church privileges, which company should feel moved to commemorate their Saviour's dying love by observing the Lord's supper, it would be more proper for the elder to preside than for the candidate to do it, the former being a spiritual officer in the church, while the latter is no official at all.

2. Not being a member of a classis, but only under its care, he cannot take part in its proceedings, nor be a delegate to one of the higher bodies. If he should happen to be an elder of a church during the period of his studies and after licensure, as has sometimes been the case, he might as such be a member of the classis, or of the synods, but not as a candidate.

SEC. 8. Every candidate for the ministry is to consider himself under the immediate direction of the Classis which examined him, and is to visit such congregations, and preach in those places to which the Classis shall send him; but, if no particular directions are given, he may preach at his own discretion in any congregation that shall invite him.

This is an excellent provision in itself, showing the interest that classes should take in their candidates. In the early part of this century there were few ministers and

very many weak and pastorless congregations, especially in new settlements on the borders of civilization. To these the classes were accustomed to send their candidates to labor among them for a designated period, and to go from one to another in turn. It was an admirable discipline for the young men, and most helpful to these feeble and destitute churches. Some of these were in Canada and some in northern and central New York.

In the present day circumstances have greatly changed. Vacant congregations usually prefer to procure their own supplies, and the help of the classis would not be welcomed. Still a classis should be ready and anxious to aid its candidates in any practicable way.

SEC. 9. A candidate who has accepted a call, must be examined for his becoming a minister. In this final examination, besides a repetition of his previous trials in composition and sermonizing, the original languages of the Sacred Scriptures, Biblical literature, and his knowledge of Theology, as well Didactic as Polemic, he shall be interrogated respecting the nature and administration of the Sacraments, the duties of the ministry, and his knowledge of Ecclesiastical History and of Church Government.

The examination for ordination is made by the classis to which the church which has called the candidate belongs.

Additional subjects for examination are enumerated in this section.

A call, whether on a candidate or ordained minister,

must be approved by the classis before it can be placed in the hands of the person called.

SEC. 10. Upon giving satisfaction in this examination, the candidate shall subscribe the following formula, viz:

“We, the underwritten, in becoming Ministers of the Word of God, within the bounds of the Classis of N. N., do hereby sincerely, and in good conscience before the Lord, declare, by this our subscription, that we heartily believe, and are persuaded, that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed (Dutch) Church, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made in the National Synod, held at Dordrecht, in the year 1619, do fully agree with the Word of God. We promise, therefore, diligently to teach, and faithfully to defend, the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching or writings. We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which are condemned in the above-mentioned Synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict them, and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church pure from such errors. And, if hereafter, any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrine should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach or defend the same, either by preaching or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiment to the Classis, that the same may be there examined: being ready always cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the Classis, under the penalty, in case of refusal, to be *ipso facto* suspended from our office. And, if at any time the Consistory, or Classis, upon sufficient grounds of suspicion, and to preserve the

uniformity and purity of doctrine, may deem it proper to require of us an explanation of our sentiments respecting any particular article of the Confession of Faith, the Catechism, or the explanation of the National Synod, we do hereby promise to be always willing and ready to comply with such requisition, under the penalty above mentioned, reserving, however, to ourselves, the right of an appeal, whenever we shall conceive ourselves aggrieved by the action of the Consistory or Classis; and, until a decision is made upon such appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed."

This section explains itself sufficiently. The remarks about subscription made under section 4 need not be here repeated.

Ministers should be conscientious in promptly fulfilling their promise to make known their doubts to the ecclesiastical authorities before promulgating them, and to submit themselves to their judgment. A different course is dishonest, hurtful to the minister himself and to the peace of the church.

SEC. 11. The Classis before which the examination of a candidate is held shall fix a day for his ordination, which ordination shall be conducted by the Classis with proper solemnity; a sermon suited to the occasion shall be preached, and the promises, directions, explanations of duty, with a laying on of hands, shall be agreeable to the form for that end expressly made and adopted; after which a certificate of his ordination, signed by the President, shall be given.

It is clearly implied in this section that the day for ordination is not to be fixed until it has been determined that there shall be an ordination; that is, after an examination has been successfully passed. This section should be strictly observed in its spirit and letter. It is the right way and the only safe way. A classis should not be willing to announce, for the sake of avoiding a special meeting, that an ordination will take place on the same day with the examination even though the notice contain the stereotyped words, "if the way be clear." The classis should avoid the risk of embarrassing themselves by inviting a congregation to witness an ordination which their consciences may perhaps not allow them to perform. The examination may be a failure or the candidate may be shown to be seriously heterodox. Cases have occurred in which members of a classis have confessed that they voted to pass a man *only* because the people were present to witness an ordination, and that while their consciences protested they yet voted as they did, because it was disagreeable to do otherwise under the circumstances, and because there was danger of disturbing the peace of the congregation.

The exercises connected with the ordination are:

1. A suitable sermon is to be preached.
2. The Form for the ordination of ministers contained in the Liturgy is to be read in connection with the laying on of the hands of the ministers with prayer, to be followed by the reading of the charges to pastor and people that are contained in the Form. Additional

charges given by persons appointed are neither necessary nor expedient. Wise is the classis that is content with those contained in the Form.

The ceremony of the laying on of hands required by this section has always been practiced by our denomination in America as well as by other Christian denominations.

This ceremony is not essential to ordination, but it is simple, significant, ancient, in accordance with spiritual examples of its employment in various services, and there is no good reason for its abandonment.

The Synod of Wesel, Ch. I. Sec. 11, declared the laying on of hands to be a matter of indifference. The Synod of Embden, Ch. I. Sec. 16, directs it to be done, but without superstition, and without regarding it as essential.

The first Synod of Dordrecht, Sec. 24, directs its omission on account of the danger of fostering superstition.

The second Synod of Dordrecht allows the laying on of hands if it can be done to edification, if not, the giving of the right hand may be substituted.

The third Synod (National) of Dordrecht enjoins it in Article 4, of the Rules of Government. •

The form of testimonial of ordination is contained in the Appendix.

SEC. 12. The office of a Minister is to persevere in prayer and the ministry of the Word; to dispense the Sacraments; to watch over his brethren, the Elders and Deacons, as well as over the whole congregation; and lastly, in conjunction with the Elders, to exercise Chris-

tian discipline, and to be careful that all things be done decently and in good order. Every Minister must consider himself as wholly devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ in the services of the Church, and shall faithfully fulfill the obligations of his call, in preaching, catechizing, and visiting his flock; and be instant in season and out of season; and, by word and example, always promote the spiritual welfare of his people.

The duties belonging to the office of a minister need not be dwelt upon. They are plainly set forth in every call, and also in the Form for the ordination of ministers.

SEC. 13. No person shall be ordained to the ministry of the Word, without settling in some congregation, except for missionary work under the direction of the Classis, or in foreign lands; and no person when ordained, shall be at liberty to relinquish his calling as a Minister for any secular avocation, except for important reasons, concerning which the Classis shall inquire and determine.

This section is prohibitory

1. Of ordination *sine titulo* except in certain cases.

Ordination it is assumed is to take place normally in connection with induction into the pastoral office in some organized church and in accordance with the call of said church.

Ordination without reference to some designated work or charge is wisely prohibited.

Ordination is allowed for missionary work under the direction of the classis. Both the worker and the work

are to be under the direction of the classis to which regular reports should be made. The work may be done within the bounds of the classis or in destitute places beyond.

Or for work in foreign lands. The foreign missionary needs all the powers conferred by ordination, for he must arrange his own work, be able to administer the sacraments to converts and to form them into churches. His case is very different from that of one who is engaged in some form of work in a community abounding in churches and ministers.

Ordination is not to be regarded as a reward of merit, or recognition of good service done, but a setting apart of one to work to be done.

2. Relinquishment of the ministerial calling except under certain conditions.

When a man enters the ministry it is expected that he will persevere in it as long as he shall have ability to serve. But Protestantism does not hold with Roman Catholicism that orders are indelible. As God calls men into the ministry, so also He may and often does call them out. We cannot successfully contend with Providence. Circumstances are compulsory. Health may fail; opportunities be withdrawn; imperative calls come from other directions. Hence among presidents of colleges, professors, teachers, editors and even business men clergymen who have left the pastoral office are found.

It is required by this section that there shall be important reasons for demission of the ministry in order

to devote one's self to a secular occupation. Also that one may not constitute himself sole and independent judge in the matter. He must submit his reasons to the classis, so that they may inquire and determine concerning them. He who fails to present his reasons to the classis until he has decided the matter for himself, has made his arrangements and perhaps has actually entered on his new occupation, and does it then only because he wishes the classis to go through the form of dissolving the pastoral connection, insults the classis and shows contempt for this provision of the constitution.

This section does not forbid a pastor from giving some of his time to other than pastoral work, especially teaching, writing or lecturing if his temporal support require it, and he does not allow it to interfere seriously with his parochial duties. This is not a case of proposed demission of the ministry which must be referred to the classis for consideration and determination.

It may be asked whether the spirit of this section does not suggest that any one who proposes to leave the work of the ministry while he is capable of performing it, not for a secular occupation, but for a life of ease, ought not to submit his important reasons to the classis?

SEC. 14. Ministers who, by reason of old age, or habitual sickness and infirmities, either of mind or body, are not capable of fulfilling the duties of the ministry, may, upon application, and sufficient proof of such incapacity being made to the Classis, be declared *emeriti*, and be excused from all further services in the Church

during such infirmity; reserving, however, to them the title, rank, and character which, before such declaration, they enjoyed. In all such cases, before the Classis declares any Minister *emeritus*, they may require a stipulation in writing from the Consistory to which he belongs, under their common seal, and signed by their President, to pay such Minister annually, in half yearly payments, during his exemption from pastoral service, for his support, such sum as the Classis shall deem reasonable, having due regard to the stated salary of such Minister, and the situation and ability of the congregation. This stipulation shall at any time be subject to modification or discontinuance by the Classis.

The term *emeritus* is applied to a minister who has been honorably discharged by the classis from active service for reasons stated in this section, for the validity of which sufficient proof has been given.

Application may be made by the minister, or the consistory or conjointly as is usually the case.

By retention of the "title, rank and character" of a minister, it is not meant that the minister *emeritus* may claim the right to undertake a church service whenever he may feel able and disposed to perform it, thus taking precedence of the minister who has been called to discharge all the duties of the pastorate. Nevertheless, the retired minister should be treated with due courtesy and the greatest respect by the acting pastor, who should be glad of his help in preaching, and the administration of the Lord's supper, and who will not be disturbed by jealousy if he is invited to take a promi-

ment part in baptisms, marriage ceremonies and funeral services.

The requirement about temporal support is sufficiently explained in the section. It was formerly enjoined on the classis to require the consistory to make some provision for it. It is now left in every case to their discretion. When the requirement was compulsory, consistories were often very loth to have their pastors declared *emeriti*.

It may be fairly inferred that a minister *emeritus* is excused from attending and presiding over meetings of consistory even during a vacancy in the active pastorate.

Ministers who are incapacitated for service should in every case be declared *emeritus*, so that they may not be reported by the classes as "ministers without charge," and so made liable to the suspicion that they have without good reason withdrawn from active service.

SEC. 15. For the regular application for dismissal of a Minister from his charge, it is required that a neighboring Minister of the same Classis to which the congregation belongs, be invited to be present, and superintend the application for said dismissal of the Minister from his congregation, countersign it, and deliver it, with a report upon the subject, to the Classis, which report and document shall serve as a basis upon which the final dismissal and certificate of the Classis shall be founded. But it is provided, that whenever either Minister or Consistory shall not join in the application, that fact shall be plainly stated in the report above described, in which case no dismissal shall be made by the Classis except after a hearing of both Minister and

Consistory in open Classis, of which hearing ten days' notice shall have first been given to both parties by the President of the Classis, whose warrant for such notice, and call of Classis, shall be the report as above described. Nor shall any dismissal be effected under circumstances now specified, except by a vote of two-thirds of the members of the Classis present.

A minister is dismissed from his charge not by the consistory of his church, but by the classis. He therefore insults both his congregation and the classis, who, purposing to take another charge, acts as if he had been already dismissed and permitted to go. He preaches a farewell sermon and perhaps removes his family and goods and then thinks of asking the consistory to unite with him in an application to the classis for a dissolution of the pastoral connection, which application it is competent for the classis to refuse to grant. Such a course is a flagrant violation of this law, as well as a breach of propriety.

The regular method of procedure is clearly described in this section.

Another minister of the same classis must superintend the proceedings in the consistorial meeting, countersign the application for dismissal, and send this document together with a report on the subject to the classis. These two documents are the basis for the action of the classis. In this case a joint application of minister and consistory is assumed.

If one of the parties refuses to join in making the application, the superintending minister is required to

report the fact to the classis. Then a special meeting of classis must be held, of which both parties must receive ten days' notice from the president of the classis, and in which meeting both parties are to be heard.

No dismissal may be granted unless two-thirds of the members of the classis present vote for it.

In a case brought before the General Synod by final appeal in 1878 it was decided that the "members present" meant all the members of the classis that were present including those who were not voting.

SEC. 16. All Ministers of the Gospel are equal in rank and authority; all are Bishops or overseers in the Church; and all are equal Stewards of the mysteries of God. No superiority shall, therefore, be ever claimed or acknowledged by one Minister over another; nor shall there be any lords over God's heritage in the Reformed (Dutch) Churches.

Ministers differ greatly in many respects, and it is to be expected that one should exercise vastly more influence than another, and that one dominating mind should at times shape the policy of a whole denomination. But this does not interfere with the principle of the official parity of all ministers. This is an essential principle of Presbyterianism in all its branches.

SEC. 17. Consistories of vacant congregations shall not invite or permit Ministers of other denominations, whose characters and standing are not known, to preach within their bounds, unless they exhibit satisfactory evidence in writing, of a recent date, of their regular

authority for that purpose, and their good standing; and, in all doubtful cases, such Consistories shall consult a Standing Committee of Classis, to be appointed for that purpose.

It is evident that no classis should ever fail to have a standing committee for the purpose described in this section.

It is not the function of this committee to arrogate authority over the vacant churches in the classis, to claim the right to send them ministerial supplies, or to meddle in their affairs except when invited, and then only in cases described in the section.

Consistories of vacant congregations are generally able to take care of themselves in this matter, and they cannot be too careful in guarding their pulpits against strangers whose characters and standing are not known to them, and whose credentials will not bear a close examination. But they are not always as careful as they should be.

Sometimes one has made his appearance in a congregation who told a very plausible story, was very winning in his manners and who talked very piously and beautifully. It hardly seemed worth while to look at his credentials at all, or to enquire into his character, standing or past record. He has been admitted to the pulpit, he has captivated the people by his eloquence, and has been called to the pastorate with enthusiasm. It has been very soon discovered that he was entirely unworthy of confidence, an impostor, a wolf in sheep's clothing.

In cases that are doubtful the consistory may and should apply to this committee for advice and aid. The committee may have knowledge of the person about whom there is doubt, or they may have facilities for learning concerning him which the consistory does not have, and they may at least be able to give judicious and seasonable advice.

SEC. 18. The Classis shall receive no Licentiates or Ministers under their care from any body of professing Christians who maintain doctrines different from those of the Reformed (Dutch) Church, without an open and explicit declaration, on their part, that they have renounced such doctrines, as contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and the standards of our Church.

It is to be presumed that a licentiate or minister coming from another denomination must have honestly believed the doctrines of that denomination. Coming to one holding differing doctrines he owes it not only to that denomination, but to himself that he make proof of his honesty and honor in the matter by such a declaration as is required in this section.

If a minister of another denomination receives an intimation that one of our churches is disposed to call him, he ought immediately to make himself acquainted with our standards of doctrine. If he cannot assent to them he should at once make it known that he could not accept a call if offered. He ought not to be willing to put a classis to the unpleasant necessity of rejecting him, nor above all to violate his own conscience by subscribing to that which he does not believe.

SEC. 19. If any application be made for the admission of a Licentiate or Minister from other churches, it shall be the duty of the Classis to subject him to such examination as shall enable them to proceed with freedom in his case.

The examination is imperative; a good certificate of dismission from the soundest body of Christians is not sufficient. The examination may be light or severe according to the case. But the classis may not stop short of a satisfactory knowledge of the qualifications of the person seeking admission.

This section is intended to supersede the rules for the "Reception of Ministers," which are printed in the Appendix to the Constitution. These rules were adopted by the General Synod in 1840 and are of doubtful constitutionality. In the edition of the Constitution published in 1892, the following note is appended to these rules:

"See minutes of General Synod 1840, page 387. The Constitution of 1874 Article II. § § 18, 19, partly modifies, if it does not actually repeal this legislation of 1840."

It would be well hereafter to omit them from the Appendix and so avoid misunderstanding and embarrassment.

ARTICLE III.

OF TEACHERS OF THEOLOGY.

SEC. 1. As it is of the greatest importance that Professors of Theology should be sound in the faith, possess

abilities to teach, and have the confidence of the churches, they shall always, for the greater security, be chosen and appointed by a vote of three-fourths of the members present in the General Synod. To prevent, as far as possible, the unhappy consequences of partiality, haste, or undue influence in obtaining an office of such consequence to the Church, a nomination of one candidate, not necessarily of its own members, may be made by each Classis, provided that such nomination be made twenty days before the meeting of the General Synod, and the name of the nominee be sent at once by the stated clerk of each Classis so nominating, to the stated clerk of the General Synod. Nominations, not to exceed three, may be made by the General Synod, provided that no election of a Professor of Theology shall ever be made on the same day on which he is nominated. From all those thus nominated, the General Synod, having fixed a day, shall proceed to an election, provided that no one nominated shall be set aside, except by the regular process of balloting for an election.

This section treats of the election of a professor.

1. He is elected by the General Synod, for that body has "original cognizance of all matters relating to the theological schools, the appointment of professors, &c." (Art. IX. Sec. 4.)

2. The election is confined to persons who have been nominated before the day of election by the classes and the General Synod respectively, as described in the section. No one can be voted for unless he has been thus nominated.

3. One who has been nominated may not be set aside before or during the election, except by the regular pro-

cess of balloting. A resolution to confine the voting to a few who are receiving more votes than others, cannot be entertained. The justice and wisdom of this provision are obvious. It sometimes happens that one who receives a large number of votes on the nomination and on the first ballot, fails to receive an additional one; also that one who had few votes at the beginning, receives additional ones until he is elected. Once, it happened that the man who had only one vote on the nomination, and who obtained no more during a number of ballotings, yet was finally elected, and his work as a professor proved that no mistake had been made.

The constitution did not contain this rule about elections until 1874, when the present constitution was adopted. Before that time, it frequently happened that when the synod was about to proceed to an election, somebody would offer a resolution that only a limited number of the nominees be voted for, being those who had been nominated by the largest number of members.

Sometimes after a few ballotings, and when the prospect was that a choice would not be reached very soon, somebody would offer a similar resolution, seeming to think that the all-important matter was to bring the balloting to an end in the shortest time practicable.

The only objection brought against this rule is that many ballotings are likely to be required, and thus much time will be consumed, and sometimes postponement of the election to another day may be made necessary. But is it not better to adjourn finally without

having made a choice at all, and to make temporary provision for instruction in the vacant department, than to do what is unjust, unwise and hazardous ?

The votes "of three-fourths of the members present in the General Synod" are necessary to effect an election. It is thought that by this means there is greater security that men will be chosen to the office who are sound in the faith, possess abilities to teach, and have the confidence of the churches, than if only a majority vote was required. Perhaps so; the rule has worked well thus far. Yet it may be that it may become necessary to elect a compromise candidate instead of a better man who could receive a majority vote, but not one of three-fourths.

The form of a professorial appointment may be found in the Appendix.

SEC. 2. No person shall be appointed to the office of a Professor who is not a Minister in good standing; and every Professor of Theology shall continue in his office during life, unless in case of such misbehavior as shall be deemed a violation of the obligations entered into at his appointment; or unless he voluntarily deserts or resigns his profession, or from age or infirmities becomes incapable of fulfilling the duties thereof; of all which the General Synod alone shall judge; and to that Synod a Professor of Theology shall always be amenable for his doctrine, mode of teaching, and moral conduct.

From Article 3, of the Rules of Church Government of the Synod of Dort it appears that one who was not a minister of the word might be a professor of theology.

It says: "No person although he be a professor of theology, elder or deacon shall be permitted to officiate in the ministry of the word and sacraments without being thereunto lawfully called."

But the explanatory articles framed for the government of the Church in this country assume that professors are ministers. In article 20 we read, "but as they are ministers who preach occasionally, &c." In one section it is required that they shall be ministers in good standing.

A minister belonging to another denomination may be chosen for professor. But in entering on his office he comes under the jurisdiction of the General Synod and becomes connected with the denomination.

As pastors are called for life to their charges so professors are appointed for life to their professorships. But a vacancy may be created

a. By removal for misbehavior or immoral conduct, heresy, or unsatisfactory mode of teaching.

b. By resignation from or desertion of office.

c. Inability to perform the duties of the office because of age or infirmities.

A professor is directly amenable to the General Synod.

SEC. 3. No Professor of Theology shall be permitted to officiate until he shall have subscribed the following formula, viz: "We, the underwritten, in becoming Professors of Sacred Theology in the Reformed (Dutch) Church, by this our subscription, uprightly, and in good conscience before God, declare that we heartily believe,

and are persuaded, that all the articles, and points of doctrine, contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed (Dutch) Church, together with the explanation of some points of the said doctrine, made in the National Synod, held at Dordrecht, in the year 1619, do fully agree with the Word of God. We promise, therefore, that we will diligently teach, and faithfully defend, the aforesaid doctrine; and that we will not inculcate or write, either publicly or privately, directly or indirectly, anything against the same. As, also, that we reject not only all the errors which militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which are condemned in the above-mentioned Synod, but that we are disposed to refute the same, openly to oppose them, and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church pure from such errors. Should it nevertheless hereafter happen that any objections against the doctrine might arise in our minds, or we entertain different sentiments, we promise that we will not, either publicly or privately, propose, teach, or defend, the same, by preaching or writing, until we have first fully revealed such sentiments to the General Synod, to whom we are responsible; that our opinions may, in the said General Synod, receive a thorough examination, being ready always cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the General Synod, under the penalty, in case of refusal, to be censured by the said Synod. And whenever the General Synod, upon sufficient grounds of suspicion, and to preserve the uniformity and purity of doctrines, may deem it proper to demand from us a more particular explanation of our sentiments respecting any article of the aforesaid Confession, Catechism, or Explanation of the National Synod, we promise hereby to be always willing and ready to comply with such demand, under the penalty before mentioned; reserving to ourselves the right of rehearing, or a new trial, if we shall conceive ourselves

aggrieved in the sentence of the General Synod; during the dependence of such new trial, we promise to acquiesce in the judgment already passed, as well as finally to submit, without disturbing the peace of the churches, to the ultimate decision of the said General Synod."

This formula of subscription for professors of theology differs only from that for ministers in that it is more full and emphatic. This is very proper in view of the influence that they must exert over the whole church, who are the teachers of those who are preparing to be teachers of the people. The particular requirements and pledges are so fully and clearly stated in the formula, that it is not necessary to repeat or explain them.

In 1834 a professor in the theological school at New Brunswick was summoned by the General Synod to explain some statements found in a sermon which he had published. He complied, and his explanation was declared to be satisfactory, although the sermon was not approved.

SEC. 4. No Professor, while in office, shall have the pastoral charge of any congregation, or sit as a member of any ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory; but as a Minister of the Gospel, may preach, and administer, or assist in administering the Sacraments in any congregation, with the consent of the Minister or Consistory.

A professor may as a minister preach and administer the sacraments in congregations when invited, but he may not hold a pastoral charge. In the Presbyterian

denomination, professors of theology are not prohibited from holding pastoral charges, but they seldom do hold them.

A professor may not sit as a member of any ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory. He cannot act as a member of the classis, nor is he under the jurisdiction of that body. In this respect also our system differs from that of the Presbyterian denomination. In it professors are members of the presbytery, and like other ministers are subject to its discipline. They may be, and often are delegated to the General Assembly. Whatever may be the merits or demerits of our system, it at least prevents all conflicting claims to jurisdiction by different courts, whenever a professor's doctrine or conduct is brought in question. With us a professor is amenable directly and only to the General Synod.

It was not so in the beginning of our ecclesiastical history in this country. Dr. Livingston was elected professor in 1784, but continued pastor in the collegiate church of New York until his removal to New Brunswick in 1810. Drs. Romeyn and Frøeligh continued to be pastors, the former until his death in 1804 and the latter until his secession in 1822.

The following is the explanatory article (20) on the subject by which the church was governed until the constitution of 1833 was adopted:

“Professors of theology have *as such* no power, jurisdiction or government whatever in the church; but as they are ministers who preach occasionally, they are entitled when they stand in connection with any con-

gregation, equally with other ministers to administer the sacraments, and to a seat and voice in ecclesiastical assemblies."

Prof. Livingston was president of the General Synod in 1803.

He was removed by death in 1825. Tradition says that the fear lest some other professor should obtain an overwhelming influence like his in the affairs of the denomination, had much to do with the introduction of the section into the constitution of 1833, whereby professors are prohibited from membership in the ecclesiastical assemblies.

The General Synod at its meeting in June, 1895, adopted a resolution to the effect that the faculties of the theological seminaries be invited "to send each year one of their number to attend the General Synod, and present before it their claims and afford information on matters which concern them; and suggest that they be heard on the presentation of the report of the committee on the professorate." (Minutes, page 71.)

SEC. 5. A Professor shall not be at liberty to resign his office without the consent of the General Synod, except upon giving three months' previous notice to the President of that body, of his intention so to do.

This section does not need explanation. Its meaning and propriety are obvious.

SEC. 6. A Professor of Theology, being amenable only to the General Synod, shall, when entering on the dis-

charge of his duties, take a dismissal from the judicatory with which he is connected; and on retiring from office shall be dismissed to such ecclesiastical judicatory as he may elect.

Formerly, a professor was not required when entering upon the duties of his office to take a dismissal from the ecclesiastical judicatory of which he was a member. He was regarded as retaining a quiescent membership, so that on resigning his professorship, he was to be recognized at once as a minister of the judicatory from which he had been called. The present rule allows him to choose the judicatory to which he is to be dismissed.

ARTICLE IV.

OF THE OFFICES OF ELDERS AND DEACONS.

SEC. 1. The office of Elders is, in conjunction with the Ministers of the Word, to exercise Christian discipline, and to be careful that all things be done decently and in order; to take heed that the Ministers, together with their fellow Elders and Deacons, faithfully discharge their respective duties; and also, especially before or after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances permit, and as shall be most for the edification of the congregation, to assist in performing visitations, in order particularly to instruct and comfort the members in full communion, as well as to exhort others to the regular profession of the Christian religion.

The government of the churches is committed to the ministers and elders. Spiritual interests are entrusted to them. On them rests the responsibility for means and agencies introduced to promote the purity and edi-

fication and spiritual prosperity of the congregation; and for the prohibition of unscriptural, unwise or dangerous measures.

The elders are to assist the pastor in systematic visitation of the congregation. The ancient custom was for the minister and an elder to do this in company, but that method is not required by this section. Whatever may be the method pursued, it is very desirable that more service of this sort than is usual should be rendered by the elders. Pains should be taken to elect men to the office who are qualified and willing to undertake this service, and who commend themselves by their consecrated spirit rather than by their social position.

It is also made the duty of an elder to call the attention of a fellow elder or a deacon to any delinquency in the discharge of duties, of which he may be guilty. Such act should always be performed in a kind spirit and should never be resented.

If an elder, deacon or member becomes liable to judicial discipline, the minister and elders constitute the court for the trial of the case.

Nor does the minister's official position exempt him from watch and care on the part of the elders. On the contrary the duty of the elder to take note of his minister's doctrine and manner of life is emphasized in the form for the ordination of elders as follows: "It is also their duty particularly to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the church; and that no strange doctrine be taught, ac-

ording to that which we read (Acts xx.) where the apostle exhorteth to watch diligently against the wolves who might come into the sheepfold of Christ; for the performance of which the elders are in duty bound diligently to search the word of God, and continually to be meditating on the mysteries of faith."

While an elder is not to be encouraged in a captious and meddlesome habit of finding fault with his minister, yet if an honest and faithful elder who truly loves his minister kindly calls his attention to what appears to be doubtful teaching or imprudence in conduct, or failure to perform some duty required of him by his call or by the word of God, he must not take it amiss, regarding it as an impertinence or insult. The old custom of handshaking on leaving the pulpit was not the ordinary social greeting but the expression of approval of the doctrine just preached. If an elder withheld his hand the opportunity was offered to the preacher to ask for the reason, and to make explanations and if possible remove misunderstandings instead of learning unfavorable criticisms through public rumor. Our churches might do a worse thing than to require their elders to occupy official seats, as is done in many churches, and to warn them that the shaking of hands with the preacher will be accepted by him as an endorsement of his doctrine and an estoppel of expressions of dissent from it made by the elders in public.

The warrant for and the duties of the eldership are fully declared in the form for the ordination of elders contained in the Liturgy.

SEC. 2. The office peculiar to the Deacons is diligently to collect the alms and other moneys appropriated for the use of the poor, and, with the advice of the Consistory, cheerfully and faithfully to distribute the same to strangers, as well as to those of their own household, according to the measure of their respective necessities; to visit and comfort the distressed, and to be careful that the alms be not misused; of the distribution of which they shall render an account in Consistory, at such time as the said Consistory shall determine, and in the presence of so many of the congregation as may choose to attend. Should more be collected than the necessities of the poor may require, such surplus may, with the consent of the Consistory, be devoted to other purposes, connected with the wants of the Church.

The office of the deacon as such is confined to care for the poor. There have been times when the deacon's office was a very important and laborious one. When Protestant refugees flocked into Holland by the thousand from France and other countries of Europe, the Church of Amsterdam gave through her deacons more money for their aid than was used for the support of the congregations. The first duty of the deacons is the collection of alms. In the "Order of Worship" we find "9th. Collection of Alms," and in the last revision of the Liturgy it is "Offerings unto the Lord." In the olden times what was thus collected was put religiously into the Deacon's Fund, except what was occasionally given for special objects. It may be doubted whether congregations are doing right in banishing alms from the ordinary worship while the name is retained in the

order of services. Since few collections are made for this fund churches rarely can do much for the poor, and there is seldom a surplus in the deacon's fund. Should not deacons, when moneys are needed, resort to personal application or devise some other lawful means for obtaining them? The following charge is given to deacons at their ordination, "And ye deacons, be diligent in collecting the alms," which is hardly fulfilled by passing the plates on four Sundays during the year. In the form of ordination it is declared that they must "do their utmost endeavor that many good means be procured for the relief of the poor."

To the deacons also belongs the distribution of the alms. This is to be done with judgment and care, making examination of every case necessary; also, personally for the deacons are charged "to visit and comfort the distressed" and to "administer relief to the poor not only with external gifts but also with comfortable words from Scripture."

Originally, the deacons held meetings by themselves and kept minutes of their proceedings and accounts separately from the elders.

Article 40 of the "Rules of Government of Dort" says, "The deacons shall likewise meet together every week, in order to transact the business relating to their office; and shall open and close their meetings with prayer. The minister shall carefully inspect the proceedings; and if necessary attend in person." The Liturgy contains "A Prayer at the Meeting of the Deacons."

SEC. 3. In all cases the Elders and Deacons shall be chosen from the male members of the Church, in full communion.

SEC. 4. In forming new churches, the Elders and Deacons shall be chosen by the male communicants, and a neighboring Minister of the Reformed Church shall preside, and notice of the time and place of such election shall be published, at least two Sabbaths, in the church, or usual place of worship, previous to the election.

It is to be regretted that more full and specific directions about the forming of a church have not been given, especially in regard to the part to be taken by the classis.

We find in the constitution only two places in which the relation of the classis to the forming of a church is spoken of, viz:

Article VII. Sec. 2, in which the powers of a classis are enumerated, among which is "forming and disbanding congregations."

Article VI. Sec. 3. "No consistory shall be constituted without the previous advice and concurrence of classis."

These sections contain general statements and not a single specific direction. The method of procedure is indicated by the section under consideration, and yet we will find that some things need to be done about which there are no written directions.

1. The advice and concurrence of the classis have been sought and obtained. How has this been done? Of course by means of a petition sent to that body

signed by communicants of one or more churches asking, not for the formation of a church, but that they the signers may be formed into a church.

This petition does not forbid the presentation to the classis of documents signed by others, declaring their wish for a church and their readiness to support it. In short, it is right that by means of documents or oral statements on the floor of the classis full information should be given concerning the nature of the field, the need of a church, prospects of growth and support; in short, everything that may help the classis to come to a correct decision.

2. The consent of the classis having been obtained, notice is given on two Sabbaths, in the place of worship, that at a certain time and in a designated place elders and deacons will be chosen by the male petitioners.

3. The election is accordingly held, a minister of the Reformed Church presiding. It is not said by whom he is to be invited, and the question arises whether the election would be invalidated if he were invited by the petitioners themselves. A case of that kind has, probably, never occurred. It is customary for the classis to appoint a committee to effect the organization, and the chairman who is a minister presides. A religious service, including preaching, is held which though not required adds interest and solemnity to the occasion. The petitioners present their certificates by which they are dismissed for the purpose of forming the new church. The election is held and the result is declared.

The question arises here, whether the persons who

have been elected may be ordained at once, or whether there must be three usual publications of their names. It is difficult to find a good reason for departing from the general rule, since we have no hint that there may be special cases which are to be treated as exceptions. The committee may be sure that they are not proceeding disorderly if they defer the ordination until three publications have been made. They will then be prepared to make their report to the classis, which will place the newly formed congregation on the list of churches under its care.

The question whether a classis or its committee has a right in forming a new church to admit persons to full communion and receive them as members of that church on confession of their faith is a very important practical one. In support of a negative answer the following considerations are adduced:

1. The practice is a modern and unauthorized innovation. It was unknown to the fathers fifty years ago.

2. The classis does not have an original right to do this; nor has such right been given to it by the constitution. In fact, a classis has no rights except those which the constitution declares to be such.

3. It is a trespass on the prerogatives of the spiritual consistory composed of a minister, if there be one, and elders. It belongs to them to admit persons to full communion. There is no intimation that this may be done by a classis or its committee.

4. It is unreasonable that a committee composed of officers in other churches should have authority to admit

members to a church to which they do not themselves belong, and whose members are not to be under their watch and care. They might admit persons whom the newly-organized board of elders, knowing them better than they, would not have received. The practice is an infringement of the principle that every society must be the judge of the qualifications of its own members.

5. It is unnecessary. It is hardly worth while to discuss the question whether something that is irregular may not be done under stress of extraordinary circumstances occurring perhaps, once in a century in some inaccessible region. We cannot conceive of a condition of things as probable, in which it would be necessary for a classis to usurp the powers of the local eldership. When a classis grants the petition of a number of church members, asking that they may be formed into a church, it knows that there are sufficient materials for the making of a consistory. It is not a function of the classis to *create* materials.

It will be said that there may be persons in the neighborhood, who are not communicants, who are greatly interested in the movement for the new church and desirous of becoming members in full communion at once. Two courses are open to them. They may either be received by the elders of the church which they have been accustomed to attend, and then join with the petitioners in obtaining certificates similar to theirs; or they may wait until the new church has been organized, and be immediately received by its elders on confession of faith.

It may be said that since the committee receives members by certificate there is no good reason why they should not receive them by confession also. But does the committee receive members by certificate as a board of elders does? Has it any other function than to be present on an appointed time to see that the certificates of the petitioners are in order, that the election is rightly conducted, to attend in due time to the ordination of the officers, and finally to report to the classis? The elders and deacons having been ordained, the books of record are opened, and the petitioners are enrolled as members.

SEC. 5. In churches already organized, the manner of choosing Elders and Deacons shall be as follows:—A double number may be nominated by the Consistory, out of which the members of the Church in full communion who shall have attained the age of eighteen years may choose those who shall serve;—or, all the said members may unite in nominating and choosing the whole number without a previous nomination by the Consistory;—or, the Consistory for the time being, as representing all the members, may choose the whole. The result of such choice shall be published in the church, or usual place of worship of the congregation, three successive Sabbaths previous to their ordination, to the end that all lawful objections to such ordination may be offered to, and duly adjudicated by, the Consistory. But where either of these modes has for many years been followed in any church, there shall be no variation or change but by application of the Consistory or upon the application of a majority of the members of the Church to the Classis, and express leave first obtained for altering such custom.

The three methods of electing elders and deacons are described with sufficient clearness in this section. Each method has its merits and also its objectionable features, and the same may not be the best one for every congregation. A minister may have decided opinions about their comparative merits but he will be wise in not urging or even suggesting a change. He should let well enough alone. It will be time enough for him to take his stand on the subject when he is compelled to do so.

To the first method of nomination by the consistory of a double number it may be objected that if all the members are to vote in the election, there is no good reason why they should not be allowed to participate in nominating; also that if the consistory is anxious for the election of certain persons, it may by nominating an equal number of men who are fit and who are unfit for the offices, virtually and almost surely control the election. Some risk is incurred by such procedure but as to damage to their reputations there is no risk, for it is certain to come and to remain. Also, half of the nominees must be defeated, and defeated candidates are often unreasonable and feel that they are ill-treated, and will never again allow their names to be placed on nomination. A certain important church recently, finding that it was impossible to fill vacancies occurring because the men best qualified refused for various reasons to be nominated, petitioned the classis for permission to adopt the third method by which elders and deacons elect their own successors.

To the second method, that of unrestricted nominations, it may be objected that one who is ambitious to be made an elder or deacon, and therefore, presumably, is not the most fit man, might easily secure for himself not only a nomination but an election. Meetings for electing officers are usually attended by a small minority of the members. It would be an easy task for one quietly to secure a majority vote, and treat the congregation to a surprise by his election.

It is claimed for the third method that an election is by it quietly accomplished; that it affords no opportunity for party strifes, political tactics or any disagreeable and perhaps disgraceful proceedings which, though happily rare, are yet possible.

The objections to this method are obvious and have often been heard. It is said that it is undemocratic, that it ignores the rights of the people, that it is a close-corporation plan, that elders and deacons reëlect themselves until death compels an occasional change; that there would be great gain in having the members to feel that they themselves are responsible for the men who have the rule over them.

It may be said that by the three publications required opportunity is given to any one to object to the ordination of a person who has been elected, and that his objection must be noticed by the consistory. But it is very obvious that it is one thing to cast a secret ballot against a man, not because you have anything against him, but only because you prefer another, and quite another thing to present a formal public objection to a

man on the ground of his belief or manner of life, which objection must be supported by valid proofs. Men are not usually in haste to express dissatisfaction in this manner.

The conclusion to which it seems we ought to come is that the question of comparative merits of modes is not to be abstractly considered, but in the light of the history, situation and circumstances of particular congregations. If the time should come when in a particular congregation there is a decided desire for change, this section describes the manner in which it may be brought about.

It is worthy of enquiry whether an election by the members may not be conducted, if it be deemed expedient, without their coming together. Suppose that the consistory should make double nominations; or that the members should from the pulpit be invited to send nominations to the president of the consistory by a certain time; that those nominations should be publicly announced, and notice be given that polls would be opened at a certain place, day and hour, and remain open for a certain length of time. The election would be under the supervision of a committee provided with a list of members entitled to vote, which committee would count the votes and report the result to the consistory.

Probably such a method has never been followed in any one of our churches. It is suggested as a way of avoiding a public meeting if for any reason there should be a wish to avoid such meeting.

As to woman suffrage in the election of elders and

deacons, there is a diversity of practice. The practice of the churches generally has been against it until recent years. Some day we will have a decision on the complaint of some woman whose vote has been rejected.

SEC. 6. The Elders and Deacons shall be chosen to serve two years, except in cases of vacancy occasioned by death, removal out of the congregation, resignation, or dismissal from office by a judicial sentence of the Consistory; in either of which cases, the person or persons chosen shall serve for the residue of the term only.

The limited term of service to which elders and deacons are appointed was a feature of Continental as distinguished from Scotch Presbyterianism. Calvin attached great importance to it. His conception of the duties of church officers was such that he thought that the burden should frequently be shifted from one to another. The Reformed churches of France and the Netherlands adopted this feature. The American Dutch churches were under the rules of Dort and conformed their practice to article 27: "The elders and deacons shall serve two years and the one-half be changed annually, and others appointed in their room, unless the situation or advantage of some particular churches should otherwise require."

On the other hand the Westminster Form of Government, Chap. xiii. Sec. 6, says: "The offices of elder and deacon are perpetual and cannot be laid aside at

pleasure. No person can be divested of either office but by deposition." The Presbyterian Church in America has lately amended this and allowed its congregations to elect elders for limited terms of service.

When a vacancy has been made, the place may be filled by one who shall be elected to complete the unexpired term of service.

Of the causes of vacancies mentioned there can be doubt about the meaning of only one, "removal out of the congregation." Dismission to another church must create a vacancy in office even if there be no formal resignation. But suppose that there is a removal of residence to some place outside of the bounds of the congregation, and a letter of dismission to another church is not taken, is the consistory justified in declaring the place vacant and in proceeding to elect a successor? It seems as if a church should have that right, but it ought to be exercised prudently. There is no compulsion to declare and proceed to fill a vacancy in such a case. There may be circumstances that will make a consistory very loth to declare the office vacant. He who has removed may be a very valuable man; he may not have gone very far, but may be able to occasionally attend services, and in some measure to perform the duties of his office. He does not wish to sever his connection nor does any one desire that he should.

But the case is very different when it is of one whose services are not valuable; who removes to a distance, and cannot even if well-disposed, perform the duties of his office even in part. He ought to be courteously

requested to resign and notified that unless he does, his place in the consistory will be declared vacant. It would be deplorable indeed if a church should be compelled to suffer because unable to fill what is an actual vacancy with some good man.

SEC. 7. In order to avoid the inconvenience of an entire change at one time, the first Elders and Deacons of new congregations, shall, at the first meeting of the Consistory after their ordination, determine, by lot, who of their number shall serve one year, and who shall serve two years; so that one-half of the whole number of both Elders and Deacons may thereafter be elected annually. The same course shall be pursued in enlarging Consistories, so far as relates to the additional members. Elders and Deacons may be re-elected, but in such case need not be reordained.

The classification directed in this section is wise, for it is made sure by it that half of the elders and deacons will consist of men who have already served one year, and who may be supposed to be familiar with the state of affairs in the congregation.

A congregation has the right to increase the number of its elders and deacons at any time to any number that may be deemed expedient.

The reordination of elders and deacons who are reelected though not required is generally practiced. It is the public ceremony of their appointment to official work, and so the repetition is not objectionable and it has its advantages.

The principle of rotation should not be held by congregations to be imperative, so that a most valuable officer is never reëlected but must give place to an inferior one because of the custom. The best men should be sought out for rulers, and often retained.

On the other hand no congregation should so commit itself to the custom of reëlecting as to exclude new men of standing or promise. It is well to introduce a fair proportion of comparatively young men, who may thus be trained for the greatest efficiency when the older men shall have passed away.

The principle of term limitation commends itself by the following considerations:

1. It affords relief. The duties may require much time and cause anxiety, and responsibilities are felt to be weighty, and men are often glad to be relieved.

2. It affords opportunity for securing the services of men of wisdom, experience and influence who have grown up in the congregation or who have come to it from other congregations.

3. It gives to the largest number an interest in and familiarity with church affairs. Those who have been members of the consistory will not be apt to lose their interest in matters with which they have been officially connected, and they are likely to have charity for their successors.

4. An unfit, troublesome or obstinate man may be removed simply by not reëlecting him. Not being a subject for discipline he would if elected for life, remain during life.

ARTICLE V.

OF ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES IN GENERAL.

SEC. 1. The Ecclesiastical Assemblies which shall be maintained are:

1. Consistorial.
2. Classical.
3. Synodical.

For this system of graded ecclesiastical assemblies the authority of Holy Scripture is not claimed. We do not see it enjoined, nor do we find an example of it. We do learn from the New Testament that churches were gathered in various places over which elders were ordained; that the qualifications of the elders are mentioned; and that praise was given to those who ruled well; also that Timothy received a gift by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. That is all of scriptural Presbyterianism of which we have knowledge.

Possibly in the conference of the embassy from Antioch to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem (Acts, ch. 15) we may have the germ which under the law of edification has been developed into a system of graded assemblies such as we have.

The "Churches under the Cross" must in some way have organized themselves according to the Genevan model. They chose and set apart to their work elders and deacons for themselves. In the synod or convention of Wesel the importance of forming several neighboring congregations into a classis for the purpose of maintaining uniformity in doctrine and discipline, as

well as for mutual help and edification was declared. The next synod held at Embden acting upon this suggestion formed seven classes; the next synod added seven to these; and the second synod of Dordrecht held in 1578 declared, "In order that good and lawful government may be established in the churches of the Netherlands, it is useful to have four ecclesiastical assemblies: First, a consistory in every congregation; Second, the classical assembly; Third, the Particular Synod; Fourth, the General or National Synod."

When the churches in America were formed into a denomination it was exactly after this model. We see no change except in the omission of the word "national." In article 38 of the Explanatory Articles we read as follows, and it must be noticed how carefully a claim for scriptural authority for these bodies is avoided:

"The Reformed Dutch Church holds the middle station between two extremes. On the one hand she denies all superiority of one minister of Christ over another; and on the other considers independent, unconnected congregations as *unsafe* and *inconvenient*. In order therefore to unite both council and energy for the promotion of the spiritual interests of the church, consistent with the liberty and dignity of the Gospel dispensation, her government is administered by classes and synods."

SEC. 2. In these assemblies, ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted, and that in an ecclesiastical manner. A greater assembly shall take cognizance of those

things alone which could not be determined in a less, or that appertain to the churches or congregations in general, which compose such an assembly.

An ecclesiastical matter is one pertaining to the church. What any one deems an ecclesiastical matter depends very much on his idea of the nature and proper sphere and functions of the church. Of course, neither the church invisible is intended, nor the Catholic church visible, but the denomination of Christians which is governed by the assemblies referred to. These assemblies do not have the care directly of all human interests. Like all other associations of people they have their specific aims and defined spheres and functions. The members of scientific and literary associations, and of corporations of all sorts may be deeply interested in various reforms in society and many other matters, and may work for them, who never think of asking a society or corporation to which they belong to endorse them; nor would they favor such endorsement if proposed. There are a thousand agencies for the suppression of evil and promotion of good in the world for which the endorsement of ecclesiastical assemblies is not and ought not to be solicited, but which ministers, elders and members may favor, coöperating with other Christians, philanthropists and good citizens. If there were no limitation of this sort, this section would be useless. Just where to draw the line of limitation is the practical difficulty. Safety is found in never losing sight of the fact that churches exist for the promotion of man's

spiritual welfare, and that the functions of all ecclesiastical assemblies are limited accordingly, and are legitimate only within the bounds of law and order.

SEC. 3. The transactions of all Ecclesiastical Assemblies shall begin and conclude with prayer.

The fact that a meeting of an ecclesiastical assembly has been opened and closed with prayer should be recorded in the minutes, for these are examined by the higher body, and this omission is sure to be noticed.

SEC. 4. Those who are delegated to attend the assemblies shall be admitted on credentials, signed by those who send them; and such only shall be entitled to a vote.

Credentials may be presented in the form of a certificate signed by the proper officials or by the production of the minute itself if the book of record be present. Delegates are usually appointed for a year to attend all stated and special sessions during that time.

SEC. 5. In all assemblies there shall be a President and Clerk. The duty of the President shall be to state and explain the business which is to be transacted, to preserve order, and, in general, to maintain that decorum and dignity becoming a judicatory of the Church of Christ. The duty of the Clerk shall be to keep a faithful record of all the proceedings.

It is not well for the minister to be both president and clerk. It may be sometimes necessary for him to

assist the clerk in putting the minutes into proper form and language, but they should be signed by another person as clerk who should also be custodian of the book. This is for the safety of the minister.

SEC. 6. A Classis has the same jurisdiction over a Consistory, which a Particular Synod has over a Classis, and the General Synod over a Particular.

The nature of this jurisdiction is not clearly defined. It can only be defined by reference to the duties and prerogatives of these respective bodies as described in the constitution Art. vii. Sec. 2, Art. viii. Sec. 2, Art. ix. Sec. 4.

SEC. 7. No member of an Ecclesiastical Assembly shall be allowed to protest against any of its acts; any member who dissents from any such acts shall have a right to require the names of all the members present who vote for or against the same, to be entered in the minutes, and published therewith for the information of all concerned.

A protest is thus defined in the rules for discipline in the Presbyterian Church, Chap. x: "A protest is a more formal declaration made by one or more members of a minority bearing testimony against what is deemed a mischievous or erroneous proceeding, decision or judgment; and including a statement of the reasons therefor.

"If a protest or dissent be couched in decorous and respectful language, and be without offensive reflec-

tions, or insinuations against the majority, it shall be entered on the records."

On account of the liability of protesters to introduce offensive matter and use vituperative language, the right to protest is by our rules denied in all cases. But a dissenting minority is allowed to call for the ayes and nays and to have them recorded in the minutes. Rule 10 of the Rules of Order of the General Synod is a repetition of this section, to which this sentence is added: "In other cases, the yeas and nays shall not be recorded unless on the demand of one-fifth of the members present."

ARTICLE VI.

OF CONSISTORIES.

SEC. 1. The Elders and Deacons, together with the Minister or Ministers, if any, shall form a Consistory, and the Minister shall preside at all consistorial meetings; but, in the absence of a Minister, the Consistory may appoint one of the Elders to be their President *pro. tem.*, and it shall be competent for the several Consistories to prescribe the mode and time of calling their meetings. If there be a plurality of ministers, they shall preside in rotation.

Originally, the consistory was composed of the minister and elders, the deacons constituting a separate body. Article xxvii. of the Explanatory Articles says: "The elders with the ministers of the word constitute what the Reformed Dutch Church properly calls the consis-

tory. But as the deacons have always in America where the congregations at first were very small, been joined with the elders, etc." This arrangement was made permissible by Article xxxviii. of the Rules of Dort: "Where the number of elders is too small, the deacons may be admitted as members of the consistory." Their joint powers are described in the next section.

If the minister be absent from a meeting of the consistory an elder may be appointed to preside. It is customary when a church becomes vacant, for the consistory to appoint one of the elders president until a minister has been obtained. A minister who is serving a church as a stated supply may not preside in meetings of the consistory for he is not a member of the body. He has no place or vote in the meetings; has no part in the admission of members, or in the administration of discipline. He is employed to do a certain work, but not to take part in the government of the church.

SEC. 2. When joined together in one Board, the Elders and Deacons have an equal voice in whatever relates to the temporalities of the Church, to the calling or dismissal of a Minister, or the choice of their own successors; in all which they are considered as the general and joint representatives of the people. But in admitting members to full communion, and in dismissing them to other churches; in exercising discipline upon those who have erred from the faith, or offended in morals; and in choosing delegates to attend the Classis, the Elders, with the Ministers, have alone a voice.

The consistory composed of the minister, elders and deacons acts as a board of trustees having charge of all the temporalities of the congregation. The pastor cannot relieve himself of his responsibility for his share as a trustee in their management. He cannot devote himself exclusively to spiritual matters any more than his fellow trustees. The election of elders and deacons to their respective offices carries with it the appointment to trusteeship unless the law of the state, which cannot be safely disregarded, should require a separate election of trustees. Where that is the case it would be wise for congregations to elect as trustees, the persons who have been made elders and deacons.

In 1784 the legislature of the state of New York passed an act entitled "An act to enable all the religious denominations in this state to appoint trustees who shall be a body corporate for the purpose of taking care of the temporalities of their respective congregations, and for other purposes therein mentioned." This act interfered, so clearly and unnecessarily, with the established practice of the Dutch churches that Dr. Livingston made a zealous, persevering and successful attempt to obtain such a modification of the act as would secure the exemption of the Dutch congregations from its operation.

In 1786 it was enacted by the legislature "that the minister or ministers, and elders and deacons, and if during any time, there be no minister then the elders and deacons, during such time, of every Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, or congregation, now or here-

after to be established in this state, and elected according to the rules and usages of such churches within this state shall be the trustees for every such church or congregation.”*

This feature of our government is thought to be one of peculiar excellence. A board of trustees is often largely composed of men who while they may be good business men, yet make no profession of spiritual religion, and cannot be in sympathy with the object for which alone a church is established. It is liable to stand in the way of measures which the spiritual rulers believe to be of the greatest importance for the spiritual interests of the congregation. In cases in which expenditures of money are required to carry on the true work of the church the trustees may be an effectual hindrance by their refusal to authorize needed appropriations. The temporal and spiritual interests of a congregation cannot be sharply separated as belonging to different spheres. The former are subordinate to the latter; they are means to an end.

It is claimed that a church should, as it is expressed, be “run on business principles.” That is very true; but it does not follow that it is therefore necessary to call in worldly men and to give them authority, however wise it may be to consult them. It is a patent fact that successful men of business are often so absorbed by their own matters, which they conduct carefully and successfully, that they are either careless and reckless or fatally conservative in the management of church affairs, as

* Gunn's Life of Livingston, p. 237.

well as in affairs of other societies of which they are trustees. Occasionally one may be found who takes pleasure in an offensive assertion of authority.

Besides, the business matters of a congregation are exceedingly simple. There is no occasion for making a great ado about them. The chief qualifications of a trustee are common sense and a good conscience. Where these are possessed, there will be deliberation, looking at a proposed measure from all points of view, knowledge of resources, and of existing and proposed expenditures, skill in providing means, and resolute determination not to incur expenditures for which resources are not in hand or reasonably in prospect. A church ought to be ashamed to confess the inability of its members to manage its temporal affairs. It is also suspected that what are vaunted as business principles may be principles that are to be carefully avoided.

Our method has worked well with us and rarely has a congregation desired to change it. Occasionally, one has tried the experiment. It has been successful for a season, but it is believed, that in most cases, there has been a glad return to the old usage. It is an open secret that very many of our Presbyterian brethren attribute most of the troubles in their congregations to the fact that they have boards of trustees apart from the church sessions. One of them has written as follows:

“Many a sad instance might be told in which a conflict between the session and the board of trustees has ruined a flourishing church. This is a great fault in American Presbyterianism. The board of trustees has

certainly no authority in the Bible or the Presbyterian standards. The Reformed churches have a better way. The elders and deacons together constitute the consistory and the pastor is the executive head. In this way there is unity, coöperation and efficiency. We doubt, whether it is practicable at present to do away with the American system of trustees, which has indeed, some advantages. There is a distribution of labor between the three bodies, elders, deacons and trustees. But we plead for some general body like the consistory, in which they may all come together with the pastor, so that there may be unity and harmony; that there may be no friction, but greatly increased efficiency. This might be done by a very easy amendment of our form of government, introducing the consistory, and defining its position and powers."*

A church should immediately after its formation become incorporated according to the laws of the state, so that the consistory may have a standing in law as a board of trustees. The process is usually a very simple one, requiring only the placing of the church on the public records under a general act of incorporation of religious bodies.

In addition to the care of the temporalities, the elders and deacons have an equal voice in the calling and dismission of a minister and in the election of their own successors. But the deacons have no voice in admitting or dismissing members, in exercising discipline or in choosing delegates to the classis.

* Prof. C. A. Briggs, D.D. in the New York Evangelist, July 25, 1888.

In order to prevent misunderstanding and confusion, the elders should meet by themselves for the exercise of their exclusive functions. Two separate books of record should be kept, one for recording the acts and proceedings of the consistory, and the other for recording the acts and the proceedings of the elders when meeting separately.

SEC. 3. No Consistory shall be constituted in any place without the previous advice and concurrence of Classis.

SEC. 4. A majority of the Consistory, regularly convened, shall be a quorum for the transaction of business; and, in like manner, a majority of Ministers and Elders alone, or of Deacons alone, so convened, shall be a quorum respectively. It shall be the duty of the Consistory, when an election shall have been omitted at the usual time, to appoint another time for that purpose, on an early day, giving the like notice as herein above prescribed; and, in like manner, to provide for filling vacancies.

On Sec. 3 see comment on Art. iv., Sec. 3.

The consistory being convened for the transaction of their legitimate business as trustees, a quorum may be composed of the minister and all the elders without the presence of a deacon, or of all the deacons without the presence of an elder. Separate meetings of deacons are implied in the rule concerning a quorum of deacons when convened as such. Elders and deacons whose terms of office have expired hold over until successors have been inducted into their places. Nevertheless, a

congregation is greatly at fault which does not heed the admonition to appoint an early day for an election to fill a vacancy or vacancies, no matter how created.

SEC. 5. As the spiritual government of the congregation is committed to the Ministers and Elders, it is their duty at all times to be vigilant, to preserve discipline, and to promote the peace and spiritual interest of the congregation. Particularly before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, a faithful and solemn inquiry is to be made by the President, whether, to the knowledge of those present, any member in full communion has departed from the faith, or in walk or conversation has behaved unworthy the Christian profession; that such as are guilty may be properly rebuked, admonished, or suspended from the privilege of approaching the Lord's Table, and all offenses may be removed out of the Church of Christ.

The enquiry enjoined in this section is known as the "*Censura Morum*," which has been substituted for the visitation anciently practiced in the churches of the Netherlands. During a fortnight before the administration of the Lord's Supper, the elders were accustomed to visit all the communicants and to report those who were found to be in any way walking unworthily. Public admonition was administered in cases deemed worthy of it. The "solemn enquiry" which must now be made of every elder should not be looked upon as a mere matter of form. It is a most wise and salutary regulation, and if conscientiously heeded must be promotive of the purity, edification and peace of the con-

gregation. It is far better that the elders should be required to watch over every individual member and give friendly warning and advice when needed, than to wait for serious accusations to be made by others, which accusations may never be made, and thus souls be allowed to go, uncared for, down to destruction.

The following suggestions are submitted:

1. Elders should have a true conception of their position and duties, and realize their responsibilities. In all that concerns watch, care and discipline they are on an equal footing with the minister. Each one of them has one vote and the minister has no more.

2. Elders should be afforded every facility for becoming acquainted with all the members of the flock. Let every one of them be provided with a complete list of the members, written or what is better, printed. This should be studied by them; it should be brought by them to their meetings so that it may be made complete to date by the addition of the names of new members, and by the erasure of the names of those who have died or been dismissed to other churches.

3. Let the names on the list be read and a pause made whenever a name is reached about which it is presumed that a question will be raised. At such places the "solemn enquiry" may be made. And then, it will not be a strange thing, if an elder should express his surprise on learning that such an one is a member of the church. This is inevitable in the case of a newly elected elder who has come from some other, perhaps distant church. He cannot be expected to know the

members of the church in which he has just become a ruler. This reading of the list will be a great help to him and to the others as well.

4. Prompt attention should be paid to the beginnings of careless habits, and to incipient lapses, so that downward courses toward backsliding and scandalous sins may be arrested, and judicial discipline may be prevented. Such discipline should in such cases be the last resort after patience in the use of kind, official and unofficial admonition has been exhausted.

5. Perhaps it would work well in some congregations to arrange the members into as many divisions as there are elders, for special oversight; this arrangement being not intended to remove from any one elder his responsibility for the care of the whole number.

6. If because of suspicions excited, one is admonished not to come to the table of the Lord, his case should be fully investigated at once.

SEC. 6. None can be received as members in full communion, unless they first shall have made a confession of their faith before the Minister (if any) and the Elders, or have produced a certificate of their being members in full communion of some Evangelical Church; all such shall be published to the congregation, and be registered as regular members in the Church.

Members are received to full communion by the minister and elders when convened in regular session. They may not be received on a report of the minister and without personal attendance except in circum-

stances that make such attendance impracticable. The elders should have opportunity to propose questions in every case. The personal knowledge of an elder concerning persons may often be of importance. Members are received in two ways:

1. By confession of faith.

The favorable decision of the elders is based not on the assurance of the regenerated state of the applicant, but on the credibility of his confession. This is determined by a *knowledge* of the fundamental truths of the Gospel as they are set forth in the "Compendium of the Christian Religion"; by profession of an *experience* of their power; and by a purpose to lead a Christian *life*, and promise to submit to Christian discipline. In judging of a confession of faith, the two extremes of strictness and laxity should be avoided. There should always be a leaning to charity, for God only can read the heart. Where there is a satisfactory confession, tender years should not be made a barrier to admission. There occur cases in which a temporary probation is a prudent measure.

2. By certificates of dismissal from evangelical churches; by which is meant churches which believe in the deity and mediatorial work of Christ, and of the renovating work of the Holy Spirit, etc. Elders are not compelled to receive every good certificate from evangelical churches, including churches of our own denomination. Every society is judge of the qualifications of its members. As the elders sit in judgment on a confession so they do on a certificate, and they are

certainly not compelled to receive the certificate of one whom they would not receive on confession. It may be that a consistory is glad to dismiss a member who ought to be disciplined, but they have no right to send him to another church; or one who is troublesome and a promoter of discord. The elders of the church to which he is dismissed may be cognizant of the facts, or knowing the man personally they may feel convinced that his admission would be a detriment to the congregation. They do not by their refusal take away his rights or privileges as a church member, for he remains in connection with his own church until he has been received by another.

At least one case has occurred in which the elders have been sustained by the classis (New Brunswick) in their refusal to receive a certificate, complaint having been made by a dissenting elder. Of course, the person whose certificate was refused had no ground for complaint.

SEC. 7. In every congregation, a distinct and fair register shall be preserved by the Minister, of every baptism and marriage there celebrated, and of all who are received as members in full communion. It shall be the duty of the several Consistories to make a statistical report to the Classis at their meeting immediately preceding the annual meetings of the Particular and the General Synod, according to such formula as the General Synod shall prescribe, and accompany the same with such remarks on the spiritual state of the congregation as they may deem proper.

The names of all who have been received to full communion whether on confession or by certificate should be placed by the clerk on the minutes of the meeting at which they were received. In every case the maiden names of wives and widows should be given.

Besides this, it is the duty of the minister to keep a record of communicants, and this should be done with the utmost care. He too should record the maiden names of women who have been married, and when one enters the married state to note the fact on the record.

It is well to keep a *chronological* and also an *alphabetical* record. The former will enable the minister to see readily how many and who, and how, that is, whether on confession or by certificate, members were received at any date. The latter will enable him to turn at once to the name of any communicant about whom information is desired. In this record all changes made by marriages, dismissions or deaths should be promptly noted, and also any facts deemed worthy of notice.

The baptismal record is kept by the pastor. When infants are baptised, the maiden name of the mother should be recorded; also anything worthy of notice connected with the baptism.

The minister also keeps a record of all marriages solemnized by him. In marrying persons he should be careful to comply with all the conditions required by the statutes of the state. Penalties are incurred by the violation of them and ought to be inflicted. A duty by no means to be neglected is to make report of the marriage in due form and within a prescribed time to the

clerk of the city or county, or such other official as has been appointed to receive it.

These records all belong to the consistory and are to be left with it on the pastor's removal.

A record of deaths, though not required ought to be kept, and also left with the consistory.

It is suggested that the minister record the marriages and deaths in a separate book for himself. He will refer to it with interest in subsequent years, and also be able often to give information to parties seeking it.

The minister will also do a good service by keeping a journal of events occurring in the congregation whether of great or little importance. Such journal will be invaluable to the preacher of a historical sermon on some future anniversary.

The annual report of the consistory referred to, must be formally adopted by that body, recorded in its minutes, and then sent to the classis. Unless so adopted, the minister has no right to present to the classis a paper purporting to be a report of the consistory.

SEC. 8. Every Consistory shall keep regular minutes of its meetings and proceedings, and shall lay such minutes, so far as the same relate to ecclesiastical proceedings, at least once a year, before the Classis with which it is connected, for their information.

Ecclesiastical proceedings are those that relate to the government of the church as such, and especially to cases of discipline and to acts bearing directly on the spiritual interests of the congregation. Information is

thus given to the classis on matters which it is the province of that body to review, to criticise and to take action upon.

It is not required, nor is it desirable to inform the classis about the temporalities, the management of funds, etc.

Hence it seems that the requirement of this section is met when the minutes of the meetings of the elders held without the deacons are laid before the classis.

SEC. 9. It shall be incumbent upon members of the Church, in removing from the bounds of one church to another, to obtain from the Consistory a certificate of membership and dismissal.

1. If it is incumbent on members when removing from a congregation to ask for certificates of dismissal, it is equally incumbent on consistories to grant them readily. They should advise and urge them to take their certificates and unite with churches in the vicinity of their new homes as soon as possible. This course is best for the interest of all parties, although the number of names on the record be diminished. Neglect of this results in a consciousness that one has no church home, no church care; hence indifference, in many cases abandonment of church ordinances and consequent deterioration of Christian character, often entrance on vicious courses. A minister by attending to this matter, and also by following absent members with persistent correspondence will seriously diminish the evil.

There may be exceptional cases, as of a valued elder, removing to no great distance, yet not near to a church of our denomination whose services in the higher assemblies it is desirable to retain. There have been cases of this sort in which the desire to remain in one's old connection has been seconded by an equally strong desire on the part of ministers and elders that he should so remain.

2. It is not well to give certificates that are not addressed to any particular church, but in general to any Christian church to which they may choose to present them. If they know not with what church they will prefer to unite, let them first remove and then decide and make their application. Wherever there is a church a post office will be found.

3. It is an excellent plan to attach a return coupon to the certificate, declaring that the person has presented it and has been duly received; this to be returned to the church from which he has been dismissed. This is important in view of the fact that the receipt of a certificate of dismissal by a member does not sever his connection with his church; that remains until he has been received by the church to which he has been dismissed. The general use of certificates of reception would tend to decrease the number of members who have been dismissed, but of whose ecclesiastical relations the consistory that dismissed them has no knowledge.

4. The "form of certificate of dismissal of church members," certifies not only that the member is dis-

missed, but that he is "affectionately recommended" to "Christian fellowship and confidence." For the relief of the consciences of elders at times, it is well to know that a simple certificate of dismissal without a recommendation is valid and is all that any one can claim. This has been so determined by the General Synod in cases of complaint that have been brought before that body. It is suggested that in order to avoid misunderstandings and hard feelings, churches should in all cases simply dismiss and not recommend. If a minister wishes specially to recommend a departing member it can be done by a private letter. (Minutes of General Synod, June, 1868.)

5. The dismissal of a member is an act of the consistory (of elders). Every certificate is signed by the president, "by order of the consistory." Therefore he should never take the responsibility of certifying to that which is not a fact. Ministers have been known who have never brought an application for a certificate before the elders, but who have at once given a certificate when applied for signed "by order of the consistory." Sometimes a member comes to his pastor toward the close of the week and says that he must have a certificate before the next Sunday, for on that day the Lord's Supper is to be observed in the church to which he desires to be dismissed. The minister straightway gives him the desired certificate. Is it not better that he should inform the applicant that it is not a case of life and death; that he will be invited by that church to commune and may do so; that he, the pastor, has no authority to dis-

miss any one; that the consistory will meet in a few days and that he will present his application which will doubtless be granted. Thus all things will be done decently and in order, and no one be harmed.

6. A member who is in good and regular standing ecclesiastically, that is, one against whom no charges have been formally brought is entitled to receive a certificate of dismission if he asks for it. If not granted, the proper investigation must be made and steps of discipline taken.

SEC. 10. Consistories possess the right of calling Ministers for their own congregations, except where otherwise provided for by charter. But, in exercising this right, they are bound to use their utmost endeavors, either by consulting with the Great Consistory or with the congregation at large, to know what person would be most acceptable to the people.

The consistory is chosen to act for the people as legislatures do for the people of the states and congress for the people of the nation. It makes or declines to make a call on any particular person to be pastor.

The consistory is however, not to act without regard to the sentiment of the people. On the contrary it is required to take pains to ascertain the preference of the people, but no method for this has been prescribed. The consistory must use its judgment in this matter. It must be understood that whatever method or methods may be pursued, the final determination rests with the consistory after the desired information has been obtained.

1. By consulting the great consistory. This is an advisory body composed of those who have held the office of elder or deacon, but who are not acting members of the consistory at the time. In churches where the habit is, not to allow their elders and deacons to serve two terms in succession, the great consistory may be a considerable body, and their advice valuable. In churches accustomed to reëlect, the great consistory, if there be any, will be of little account.

2. By calling a meeting of the members of the congregation. This is a common method but often very unsatisfactory and attended with great risk. Owing to culpable indifference or unwillingness to take responsibility or for other reasons, comparatively few persons usually attend a congregational meeting appointed for this or any other purpose, unless some exciting question is to be considered and parties have been formed. In such circumstances mischief may be expected from such a meeting. Many questions also arise which are not easy of solution as, who are entitled to vote, whether communicants only or also supporters of the church male or female. If it be said that the rule followed in elections of elders and deacons should be followed in the election of a minister, it may be replied that this is not an election for a minister. It is a meeting called by the consistory for consultation and is in the line of "utmost endeavors" on their part to learn who would be most acceptable to the people. A majority vote in such a case is not a vote of instructions which the consistory is bound to obey. Nor is this a meeting recog-

nized by the constitution and to be conducted according to constitutional provisions. If the consistory wish to know the opinion of non-communicant supporters, there seems to be nothing to hinder them from asking for them. A practical difficulty is found in the fact that it is commonly thought by the people and even by the consistories, that a majority vote of a congregational meeting, small or large, settles the question, and that a consistory is obliged to act accordingly. Consider two cases of which the writer has personal knowledge. The members of the consistory of a certain vacant church were unanimously in favor of calling a most excellent man, and they presumed that the people thought as they did. A congregational meeting was called, and to their surprise in a small assembly, which was called a meeting of the congregation, another man received a majority of the votes. The consistory thought that they were compelled to call him and did so reluctantly, and brought disaster on the congregation. The consistory of another church being unanimously opposed to one who received a majority vote of the people assembled, declined to make out a call for him, on the ground that not they only, but the best part of the congregation was strongly opposed to the man. There was at first a ripple of dissatisfaction, but the consistory was justified by the result.

It is the duty of a consistory to look at other things than the vote of a congregational meeting. They not only may but ought to enquire whether the people have been fairly represented in the meeting. Votes should

be weighed as well as counted; a minority may be of vastly more account than the majority. Combinations may have been formed of not the best elements, and many other things may require consideration. On the whole, a consistory is wise that seeks to "know what person would be most acceptable to the people," by other means than by a public meeting and a majority vote.

3. By making a thorough canvass of the congregation. Sometimes, in congregations where the salary and other expenses are raised by subscription, a paper is circulated, and if the subscriptions are sufficient and heartily made, it is concluded that the person in question is the one that is "acceptable to the people." Certainly no better proof could be given. In the same way, where no subscriptions are sought for, the people might be personally visited and their sentiments be ascertained. And it is well to note public sentiment as expressed on the streets, in places of business and wherever people do congregate.

What has been said about meetings of the congregation is not intended to encourage consistories to disregard the wishes of the people about the choice of a minister. They are charged to use their utmost endeavors to ascertain those wishes. Our intention is only to show that their wishes can be better learned in other ways than by public meetings.

A consistory should be very careful to examine into the antecedents of a minister whom they propose to call, and not be in haste to call one who has captivated

the people by two or three eloquent sermons. Such sermons are easily procured. Enquiry should be made into his doctrine, manner of life, methods of work, success in winning souls, and in edifying God's people. Care about these things would have saved many a congregation from a bitter experience.

SEC. 11. A Minister of the Classis must be invited to superintend the proceedings, whenever a Consistory is desirous of making a call. The instrument is to be signed by the members of the Consistory, or by the President in the name of the Consistory; and if the Church be incorporated, it is proper to affix the seal of the corporation. When the call is completed, it must be laid by the Consistory before the Classis, and be approved by the same, before it can be presented to the person called; and if the call be accepted, the name of such Minister shall be published in the church three Sabbaths successively, that opportunity may be given for stating lawful objections, if any there be. When any circumstances shall, in the judgment of the Consistory, make the presiding of their own Minister at its sessions undesirable, they may, on the request of their pastor, invite a Minister of their own Classis to preside on the occasion.

There is nothing in the first part of this section that needs explanation. It will be noticed that a call cannot be put into the hands of the person called before it has been submitted by the consistory to the classis for approval and it has been approved by that body. There may be, and usually is, a conditional agreement between the consistory and the person called, to the effect that

he will accept the call if it should be approved, the conditions having been made known to him. The three required publications of his name should not be made before the call has been presented to him by the classis and accepted by him. Circumstances might otherwise occur that would be very embarrassing to all parties concerned, the classis, the congregation and the man himself.

The closing sentence of the section seems to be irrelevant, and as if it had been inadvertently placed there. It ought to have been numbered as a section by itself. In certain situations it is manifestly improper and undesirable for the pastor to preside in a meeting of the consistory, especially in cases of discipline in which he is personally involved. The insertion of this provision was suggested by a case of discipline of a member on a charge of having slandered the pastor. It was rightly deemed that the minister ought not to be the presiding judge in what was virtually his own case. It is presumed that a minister thus invited is merely to preside, but has no vote inasmuch as he is not a member of the court.

SEC. 12. For the purpose of uniformity, the form of a call shall be as follows:

“To N. N.

“*Grace, Mercy and Peace; from GOD our FATHER, and
JESUS CHRIST our LORD.*

“WHEREAS, the Church of Jesus Christ at —, is at present destitute of the stated preaching of the Word, and the regular administration of the ordinances, and is

desirous of obtaining the means of grace, which God hath appointed for the salvation of sinners, through Jesus Christ his Son: AND WHEREAS, the said Church is well satisfied of the piety, gifts, and ministerial qualifications of you, N. N., and hath good hope that your labors in the Gospel will be attended with a blessing: Therefore, we (*the style and title of the said Church*) have resolved to call, and we hereby solemnly, and in the fear of the Lord, do call you, the said N. N., to be our pastor and teacher, to preach the Word in truth and faithfulness, to administer the holy Sacraments agreeably to the institution of Christ, to maintain Christian discipline, to edify the congregation, and especially the youth, by catechetical instructions; and, as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, to fulfill the whole work of the Gospel ministry, agreeably to the Word of God, and the excellent Rules and Constitution of our Reformed (Dutch) Church, and to which you, upon accepting the call, must with us remain subordinate.

“In fulfilling the ordinary duties of your ministry, it is expressly stipulated, that, besides preaching upon such texts of Scripture as you may judge proper to select for our instruction, you also explain a portion of the Heidelberg Catechism on the Lord’s Days, agreeably to the established order of the Reformed (Dutch) Church; and that you farther conform in rendering all that public service which is usual, and has been in constant practice in our congregation. The particular service which will be required of you is (*here insert a detail of such particulars, if any there be, which the situation of the congregation may render necessary; especially in case of combinations, when the service required in the respective congregations must be ascertained; or when the Dutch and English languages are both requisite, the proportion of each may be mentioned or left discretionary, as may be judged proper*).

“To encourage you in the discharge of the duties of your important office, we promise you, in the name of this Church all proper attention, love, and obedience in the Lord; and to free you from worldly cares and avocations, while you are dispensing spiritual blessings to us, we (*the Elders and Deacons, etc., the style and title of the Church*) do promise and oblige ourselves to pay to you the sum of —, in — payments, yearly, and every year as long as you continue the Minister of this Church, together with (*such particulars as may refer to a parsonage or other emoluments*). For the performance of all of which, we hereby bind ourselves, and our successors, firmly, by these presents. The Lord inclines your heart to a cheerful acceptance of this call, and send you to us in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of peace.

“Done in Consistory, and subscribed with our name this — day of —, in the year of —.”

Attested by N. N., Moderator of the call.

There was no prescribed form of a call until the adoption of the Explanatory Articles, when the one contained in this section was made a part of the constitution. (Art. xxxvi.) The calls previously made varied greatly. Many old calls were curiously minute in enumerating the duties of both minister and congregation. Now calls differ from each other in details that belong especially to the particular congregation. Not only is the consistory that makes the call bound by its terms but also its successors.

The call is a contract in law and subject to all the conditions of such contracts. If the minister fails in the performance of any duty to which he is bound by

his contract, he loses his claim for salary. He cannot recover anything by means of a suit at law. The consistory is released from pecuniary obligation.

He who receives a call should carefully consider every requirement that is made of him by it. If he cannot comply with the requirements, it is his duty as an honest man to decline it. The notion that a call is a mere form, except in the matter of payment of promised salary, is to say the least demoralizing.

It would be an excellent thing to read a call in full to the congregation after it has been made, so that they may learn what are its contents. Rarely do people know what is required of their minister, or what the consistory have obligated themselves to do for him, except it be the amount of salary promised. About that they make sure that the congregation shall become informed.

SEC. 13. Since it is deemed of the highest importance that there should be regular instruction on the great articles of the Christian faith, in order to preserve the truth, and to promote the prosperity of the Church, every Minister shall, in the ordinary morning or afternoon service on the Lord's Day, explain the system of the Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism adopted by the Reformed Churches, so that, if practicable, the explanation may be annually completed, but shall never be extended beyond the term of four years. The several Classes shall, at their stated meetings, preceding the annual meeting of General Synod, make strict inquiry whether the preceding part of this section has been fully complied with by every

Minister, and if any Minister shall be found deficient, without sufficient reason, the Classis shall inflict such censure as they in their wisdom may judge the omission to merit; and the several Classes shall make a full and faithful report of the result of their inquiries and doings on this behalf to the Particular Synod.

This section contains the requirements in regard to the explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism from the pulpit, and the reasons why this is deemed of the highest importance. In accordance with this it is placed in the minister's call as a special duty enjoined, and which by his acceptance he promises to perform.

The manner in which this explanation is to be made every minister must determine for himself. Overtures are occasionally sent to the General Synod asking for relief from the requirement, or for a modification or explanation of it; but it should be understood that the General Synod can do nothing in the matter except in the way of recommending an amendment of some sort to the constitution.

Authority in this matter was expressly disclaimed by the General Synod of 1892 in the resolution "that this whole matter of expounding the catechism and catechizing the youth of the church must be left to the conscience of the pastor and judgment of the church he serves, and of the classis to which he belongs."

Of course the synod did not mean to say that a minister was at liberty to comply with this constitutional requirement or not, as seems best to himself, for the constitution is above the General Synod. Nor did that

body intend to give ministers permission to follow their own consciences in the manner of attending to the duty, for the time has never been when they have not possessed this liberty, for which an endorsement, by even the General Synod, is not needed.

The General Synod intended to declare that whatever needs to be done in this matter is not within its province, but of that of the minister who is to act conscientiously in the discharge of his obligation; of the consistory, since the elders are particularly admonished to "have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the word," and who are therefore to remind ministers of their delinquency in respect to this, as to any other neglected duty; and of the classis to whom answer is annually made to the question, "Is the Heidelberg Catechism regularly explained agreeably to the constitution of the Reformed (Dutch) Church?"

SEC. 14. When any Minister shall be duly convicted of any offence which affects the purity of his clerical character, he shall, in consequence of such conviction, be suspended from his office; and if the conviction and suspension shall be sustained on a final appeal, his pastoral connection with the congregation in which he was settled shall be, *ipso facto*, dissolved.

To imprudences which mar a minister's influence, his attention may properly be called by his elders. But if he is convicted by the classis of some serious offence, he must be suspended from the exercise of his office. If he appeals he remains pastor, although not acting, until

the appeal has been decided. If on an appeal to the final court, the conviction is sustained his connection with the congregation is *ipso facto*, that is, without further proceedings dissolved. If he declines to appeal, the same result must follow at once.

SEC. 15. Consistories which have hitherto combined with one or more neighboring Consistories, in making calls, and having a Minister to serve in common, may not at pleasure break such combination; but whenever their situation and circumstances render them capable of severally calling a Minister, a representation thereof must be made to the Classis, and leave be first requested and obtained, before their former connections can be dissolved.

SEC. 16. As in calling a Minister, Consistories are bound to consult with the Great Consistory, or with the congregation at large, so when other matters of peculiar importance occur, relating to the peace and welfare of the whole congregation, they are strongly recommended to seek such advice. All who have ever served as Elders or Deacons, constitute, when assembled, what is called the Great Consistory; but being out of office, and not actually members of the Board of Corporation, they have only an advisory voice.

In the early history of our congregations in this country many were very weak, and many combinations of two or more were formed in calling a minister; and some still exist. The rule in our section is a good one for the protection of weak congregations. It is pertinent to enquire whether two or more struggling churches in the vicinity of each other should not be advised to unite in

the calling of a minister. It would be better to do this than to starve two ministers, or call on the Board of Domestic Missions for aid.

The members and functions of the great consistory are clearly defined in this section. It is noticed that although the consistory has the powers of government they are to exercise them as representatives of the people. They should always consult them when matters of importance to the whole congregation occur.

ARTICLE VII.

OF THE CLASSIS.

SEC. 1. A Classis consists of all the Ministers, and an Elder delegated by each Consistory within the bounds prescribed by Particular Synod. Collegiate Churches shall be entitled to an Elder for each ordinary worshipping assembly. To constitute a Classis, at least three Ministers and three Elders are required.

It is not claimed that we can find types in the New Testament of district presbyteries, or as we call them, of classes. The parochial presbytery, session or consistory of elders is more easily found. We are at a great disadvantage when we contend for Presbyterianism *jure divino*, and are on sure ground only when we claim that the presbytery or classis is a constitutional body put in its place in line with the other bodies and deriving its authority from the same source; that its powers are defined by the constitution; that it has surrendered nothing by the formation of a constitution; and that it is competent for the church by an orderly and legiti-

mate exercise of authority to modify its powers and prerogatives.

In the New York Evangelist of April 5, 1888, Prof. C. A. Briggs wrote as follows under the heading, "What is a Presbytery?"

"A presbytery is a body of presbyters or elders, however *small* or *great*. All ecclesiastical courts, from the highest to the lowest, are presbyteries. Usage may give the term to one body rather than to another; but in fact it belongs to them *all*, and it is this theory of government that gives the Presbyterian church its name."

* * * * *

"We notice the abandonment by the American Synod of the the term 'Classical Assemblies,' and the substitution of the term '*Presbyterial*.' The term presbytery is a Scotch term. The churches of the continent are followed by the Reformed churches in America in the use of the term *classis*. This was the term used by the Westminster divines when they organized the Provincial Assembly of London with twelve classes in 1647. It is true, the term presbytery appears in the Westminster form given above, but this was a variant of their usual term *classis* and it was doubtless to please the Scottish commissioners. We think that the term *classis* is a *better* one for several reasons: (a) It is inappropriate to take the term presbytery which belongs properly to *all* of these bodies, from the highest to the lowest, and use it for *one* of them. It has had the unfortunate effect that presbyteries in Scotland and America have

had an exaggerated idea of their own importance as if they were the fountain of Presbyterian government, when really they are simply an intermediate body with the Provincial Synod between the *fundamental* body, the congregational presbytery or session, and the *culminating* body the National Synod or General Assembly. In the history of Presbyterianism, especially in America, the presbytery has too often lorded it over the congregation in an un-Presbyterian manner, and has even ventured to regard the General Assembly as its creature, on a theory of Presbyterianism that corresponds with that of 'states rights' in the nation. (b) In view of a future union with the Reformed bodies, we shall have to resume the more appropriate name *classis*, which is common to the Presbyterian and Reformed world. We cannot expect them to take a term which is peculiar to Scotch Presbyterianism."

It is our good fortune never to have known any thing of High Church or *jure divino* Presbyterianism, but to have inherited the liberal type of the continental churches, and notably that of the church of the Netherlands, to which the wise and noble fathers of the Reformed Dutch Church in America held fast as the more liberal, sensible and scriptural.

Beside pastors and delegated elders, ministers without charge are members of the *classis*. These last may belong to a *classis* without respect to the place of residence.

Does the phrase "to constitute a *classis*" mean that a quorum for the transaction of business must always

be composed of at least three ministers and three elders; or that a classis may not be formed or established unless there is material to the extent at least of three ministers and three elders? The latter is probably the correct view. If it were intended to prescribe the number of a quorum, it probably would have been so expressed, as in the case of the sections about the consistory and the synods. Classes are sometimes formed of no more, or a very few more members than the number here designated. It cannot be supposed that an attendance of the whole or nearly the whole number is required to make a quorum. Vacancies occurring, sickness and many other circumstances would frequently make a meeting of classis impossible.

The presumption is that, in accordance with the general custom of deliberative bodies, every classis may make its own rule in regard to a quorum. However, except in extraordinarily small classes it is well that a quorum should embrace at least three ministers and three elders.

SEC. 2. Classis shall have the power of approving or disapproving calls; constituting and dissolving the pastoral relation; ordaining, installing, suspending, deposing, and dismissing ministers. They shall have the power of forming and disbanding congregations, of approving and dissolving combinations of two or more congregations; and of exercising a general superintendence over the spiritual interests and concerns of the several churches, and an appellate supervising power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of the Consistories relating to Christian discipline.

The classis may disapprove a call on the ground of irregularity in the proceedings of the consistory; or if it does not contain all the duties mentioned in the form; or if it contains unreasonable requirements; or if it be for a limited time; or if the salary be conspicuously inadequate; or if a strong protest from the congregation is presented; or if anything has been learned to the serious disadvantage of the person called.

On forming congregations see Art. iv. Sec. 4.

When a church has become so weak as to be unable to maintain religious services, and there is no promise for the future it may on its own request be disbanded by the classis. If a classis thinks that a church ought to be disbanded for good and sufficient reasons it has the right to disband it, though this may be contrary to the wish of the church itself.

On the exercise of a general superintendence and the function of the classis as a court of appeal nothing need be said.

SEC. 3. The peculiar prerogative of Classes, that of examining students of Theology for their becoming candidates for the ministry, and of candidates for their becoming Ministers, is very important, and must always be attended to with great prudence, zeal, and fidelity. Every student of Theology, when he shall have become prepared for examination for licensure, shall present himself for such examination to the Classis within whose bounds he resided when he entered upon his preparatory studies, and a candidate who has received a call, must be examined by the Classis under whose jurisdiction the Church that has made the call is placed.

It is the peculiar prerogative of the classis to examine students for licensure and candidates for ordination. That is, the other assemblies of the church have no authority to exercise it. It was made the peculiar prerogative of the classis by the constitution of 1833. Before that time under the Explanatory Articles this prerogative was shared by the Particular Synod. Article xlvii. says: "Notwithstanding the power of examination is *conferred* upon the classes, the Particular synods (until it be otherwise determined in the General Synod) will continue as heretofore to examine and license; and it shall still remain in the choice of any student in theology, or of any candidate who has received a call, to be examined by the synod."

The withdrawal from the synod of the right to examine was a wise act. It is better that it should be confined to one body and that this body should be the classis in preference to the synod. The classis is a smaller body, more easily convened in special session, and more likely to show personal interest in students and candidates. In the Presbyterian denomination also, the synods examined at first as well as the presbyteries. In the German branch of the Reformed Church this is to-day the prerogative of the synods as well as of the classes. Thus the classis has acquired this peculiarity or exclusiveness of prerogative by the amending of an ecclesiastical constitution, and not by presbyterial succession from the presbytery that laid hands on Timothy.

After the student has received his professorial certificate he presents himself for "examination to the classis

within whose bounds he resided when he entered on his preparatory studies." This means where he resided ecclesiastically, not necessarily geographically, that is, where his church membership was at that time. He may have removed since to a distance and been received by certificate into another church, but the rule remains and is very explicit.

When did the student enter upon his preparatory studies? When he came to the theological school, and entered on the studies that are specifically and directly preparatory to the ministry. It is true that all the studies that he has ever pursued from the alphabet on, have contributed their share in preparing him for his calling, but all the studies to the end of the collegiate course are preparatory to other professions and occupations as well as to that of the ministry. We cannot well find a starting point so satisfactory as the door of the theological school.

Before this requirement was placed in the constitution, the students in the theological school, with rare exceptions, united by certificate with the Dutch Church of New Brunswick and they were licensed by the classis of New Brunswick. Possibly a feeling of jealousy was excited among the other classes. It was considered desirable to have the examinations distributed through the denomination. It was thought that it would be an advantage to the ministers and churches as well, and advantageous to the young men. It is to be regretted that by means of the extension of the denomination the rule has in some cases worked inconvenience and proved to be burdensome.

SEC. 4. Every Classis shall keep a book, in which the forms of subscriptions for candidates and Ministers of the Gospel are fairly written, which those who are examined and approved shall respectively subscribe in the presence of the Classis. It shall also be the duty of every Classis, annually, to report to the Synod all persons who have been examined and licensed, as well as those who have been ordained; and also, all removals of Ministers from one place to another, or by death, which may have happened within the jurisdiction of such Classis, since the last session of Synod.

SEC. 5. Whenever the examination of a candidate for the ministry, the approbation of a call, or any other special business, shall render an extraordinary meeting of the Classis necessary, it shall be the duty of the President of the Classis, upon application being made to him for that purpose, to call, by circular letters, the members together. And, whenever two Ministers and two Elders belonging to the Classis shall upon *any occasion*, request in writing, under their hands, an extraordinary meeting, the President of the Classis may not refuse calling the same; provided that the expenses attending all extraordinary meetings of the Classis shall be paid by the person or congregation at whose request, or for whose benefit, such session is held.

SEC. 6. The meetings of the Classes shall be semi-annual, at such times as they may respectively determine; and at every ordinary session there shall be a sermon, or other devotional services, or both.

No explanation of these sections is needed.

SEC. 7. The Classes shall, at their meeting next preceding that of the Particular Synod, appoint delegates to attend the said Synod, and nominate delegates to the

General Synod; and, at the same meeting, shall put to the Ministers and Elders, respectively, the following inquiries, and enter in detail the several answers given by each Minister and Elder, on the minutes, for the information of the higher judicatories:

1st. Are the doctrines of the Gospel preached in your congregation in their purity, agreeably to the Word of God, the Confession of Faith, and the Catechisms of our Church?

2d. Is the Heidelberg Catechism regularly explained agreeably to the Constitution of the Reformed (Dutch) Church?

3d. Are the catechising of the children and the instruction of the youth faithfully attended to?

4th. Is family visitation faithfully performed?

5th. Is the 5th Sec., 6th Art., in the Constitution of our Church, relating to the conduct of church members, carefully obeyed, previous to each communion?

6th. Is the temporal contract between Ministers and people fulfilled in your congregation?

7th. Is a contribution made annually by your congregation to each of the Benevolent Boards and Funds of the Church?

Originally the classis sent committees to the various churches to enquire into their condition and to report. The minister, elders and deacons were separately questioned about the state of affairs in the congregation, so that evils if any existed might be corrected and aid and encouragement be given to all efforts that aimed at the promotion of godliness. The present system of annual questioning in the meetings of the classes has taken the place of the classical visitations. The answers given are entered in detail on the minutes and transmitted to the Particular Synod.

To the first question many ministers might answer in the affirmative whether belonging to our denomination or not. The second is not answered satisfactorily by one who says that he preaches the doctrines of the catechism. He has already said that in his answer to the first question. By the second he is asked concerning his conformity to the constitutional requirement and usage of the church concerning the explanation of the catechism, not whether its doctrines are preached by him. The manner in which the catechism is to be explained is not defined; that is left to every minister's judgment and conscience.

The General Synod of 1892 passed a resolution to the effect that the answers to this question need not be categorical. This was unnecessary, for the answers are to "be recorded in detail," and in Art. vi., Sec. 13, it is said, "if any minister shall be found deficient without sufficient reasons." These expressions imply the right of one to have his statement of reasons recorded.

ARTICLE VIII.

OF THE PARTICULAR SYNOD.

SEC. 1. Every Particular Synod shall comprehend a certain number of Classes to be designated by the General Synod, and shall consist of four Ministers and four Elders from every Classis within its bounds; and six Ministers and six Elders, when regularly convened, shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

The synod in the Presbyterian denomination, placed between the presbytery and General Assembly is a con-

ventional body composed of all the ministers within a certain district and an elder from every church in the same district. The Particular Synod in our Reformed Church is a delegated body, composed as described in this section, which also prescribes the quorum for the transaction of business.

There are four Particular synods, viz: those of New York, Albany, Chicago and New Brunswick.

The Particular synods, or as they were sometimes called Provincial synods, were in early times in the Netherlands far more important than they are now in our land, because of the circumstances of those times.

SEC. 2. To the Particular Synod belongs the power to form new Classes, to transfer a congregation from one Classis to another, to exercise a general superintendence over the spiritual interests and concerns of the several Classes within its bounds, and an appellate supervising power over their acts, proceedings, and decisions relating to Christian discipline.

SEC. 3. Every Synod shall be at liberty to solicit and hold correspondence with its neighboring Synod or Synods, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to general edification.

The powers of the Particular Synod are briefly stated, among which is its judicial function in cases of appeal from decisions of the classis relating to discipline.

Correspondence with neighboring Particular synods has been held sometimes by the attendance of a delegate, sometimes by letter.

SEC. 4. A copy of the minutes of every session of the several Classes held since the last session of Synod, shall, at the opening of the Synod, be produced and laid on the table for the inspection of the members. The Particular Synod, from the several reports of the Classes, on the state of religion, shall prepare a Synodical Report, to be presented to the General Synod, accompanied with the statistical tables of said Classes.

As the classis examines the minutes of the consistory so far as they relate to ecclesiastical matters, so the Particular Synod examines those of the classes.

The fulness and interest of the general report on the state of religion made by the General Synod depends altogether on the reports received from the Particular synods. Those bodies therefore are accustomed not only to send up all the statistical tables, but the complete reports of the classes. The sessions of the Particular synods are too brief to allow the preparation of satisfactory reports in any other way.

SEC. 5. The Particular Synod shall meet annually, at such time and place as they may determine; and special meetings may be held for the transaction of any extraordinary business, upon the written request of four Ministers and four Elders to the President of the Synod; and, in such case, it shall be the duty of such President to give notice to the members of Synod of such meeting three weeks previous thereto, stating the particular object for which the Synod is to be convened.

The directions as to annual and special meetings are sufficiently clear. The particular object for which a

special meeting is called must be stated, but it is according to the usage of such bodies that other matters may be attended to, provided that they be mentioned in the call.

ARTICLE IX.

OF THE GENERAL SYNOD.

SEC. 1. The General Synod shall consist of three Ministers and three Elders from each of the Classes, composed of fifteen or less than fifteen churches; and an additional representation of one Minister and one Elder shall be allowed for each additional five churches. These persons shall be nominated by the Classes to the Particular Synod to which they belong, who shall have power to appoint them delegates to the General Synod; but, for good cause, it may appoint other persons than those so nominated; or, in case no nomination is made, may appoint the delegates for the Classis or Classes who shall have omitted to nominate. The body thus constituted shall be called "The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America."

Formerly the delegations to the General Synod were the same in number from all the classes whether large or small. The manifest injustice of this led to the adoption of the present method as described in this section.

The nomination of delegates is made by the classes, the appointment by the Particular Synod. The nominees are almost invariably confirmed. But if a death or removal occur between the meetings of the classis and of the Particular Synod, or the names by some mishap may fail to reach the latter body, or there be any

good cause whatever, the synod may appoint men who have not been nominated by the classis.

SEC. 2. The removal of any delegate, during the period for which he was appointed, from the Classis which he was commissioned to represent, shall vacate his seat in the General Synod.

SEC. 3. The General Synod shall meet annually at such time and place as they may determine; and twelve Ministers and twelve Elders, when regularly convened, shall be a quorum for the transaction of business.

A general synod is supposed to continue in existence for one year, so that every delegate is appointed for that period and is expected to attend special meetings during that time. But if one remove from the classis that nominated him he is obliged to vacate his seat, and then one of the *secundi* may fill it.

SEC. 4. The General Synod shall have original cognizance of all matters relating to the Theological Schools, the appointment of Professors, and their course of instruction; the appointment of Superintendents of said schools, and the regulations thereof; and shall possess the power of regulating and maintaining a friendly correspondence with the highest judicatories or assemblies of other religious denominations, for the purpose of promoting union and concert in general measures which may be calculated to maintain sound doctrine, prevent conflicting regulations relative to persons under church censure by the judicatories of either denomination, and to produce concert and harmony in their respective proceedings to promote the cause of religion and piety.

To the General Synod belongs the power to constitute

Particular Synods, and to make any changes in the same; to exercise a general superintendence over the spiritual interests and concerns of the whole Church, and an appellate supervising power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of the lower assemblies, relating to Christian discipline.

Among the prerogatives of the General Synod are original cognizance and complete control of the theological schools; correspondence with the highest judicatories of other denominations for the promotion of union and Christian fellowship and of respect for each other's discipline. Articles of correspondence between the Presbyterian and Reformed Dutch churches were adopted in 1822 embracing quite an elaborate plan of fraternal action (see Digest, ch. xii., sec. 2) which has never been abrogated. Where there is no formal agreement of this sort, our denomination has recognized the claims of Christian courtesy and the importance of coöperation in labors for truth and righteousness; and in refusal to intrude into fields occupied by struggling churches of other denominations.

The "general superintendence over the spiritual interests and concerns of the whole church" covers a very wide field, embracing the work done through various boards and other agencies for the promotion of true religion at home and abroad. The zeal with which this field is cultivated, should, however, be equalled by a care not to trespass by crossing its boundaries and occupying territory that belongs to another. Special care should be taken not to intrude on the lower bodies

by doing that which a consistory or classis is competent to do, or which it has been authorized and charged to do. The General Synod is a constitutional body equally with the others, and its powers and prerogatives are defined by the constitution as well as theirs. Service intended to be helpful may be resented as meddlesome.

In the Presbyterian Church, immediately after the civil war, questions arose in the border states about church property and discipline that tempted the General Assembly to exercise original powers of jurisdiction. This course seemed to be necessary in order to overcome certain difficulties. It was regarded by many good men as a sacrifice of essential principles to temporary expedients, under great pressure yet unconstitutional and exceedingly dangerous. Dr. George Junkin wrote much with his characteristic vigor against what he called the "doctrine of the omnipotence of the General Assembly." (Life of Geo. Junkin, D.D.)

It is not strange that some who have never studied the subject should have exaggerated notions of the powers of the General Synod, and should also think that its wisdom is commensurate with its powers. Happily, men are always at hand who exercise a jealous watch and who know just when the brake should be put down.

It may be worthy of consideration whether consistency and stability of policy and action would not be promoted if the members of the General Synod were elected to serve three years, the terms of one-third to expire each year.

SEC. 5. When, in the circumstances of missionary fields, it shall be impracticable for a Classis to comply with all the requirements of the Constitution, the General Synod shall have full power to grant such dispensation as the wants of the case may demand.

This section was introduced as an amendment to the constitution in the early history of the Classis of Arcot. It was suggested by the desire of the classis to examine a native for licensure and ordination. At that time the examinations could not be held without the presence of a *Deputatus Synodi*. This was an officer of the Particular Synod whose duty it was to see that the examination was fairly and properly conducted. Inasmuch as a *Deputatus* could not well be sent from America to India to supervise an examination, the constitution was amended to meet the case. The amendment was made general so as to apply to all cases that might occur. The office of *Deputatus* was discontinued after the adoption of the present constitution.

SEC. 6. If circumstances should require a meeting of the General Synod previous to the next ordinary meeting, the President shall, on a joint application of six Ministers and six Elders requesting the same, call an extraordinary meeting at the place where the next ordinary meeting is appointed to be held, or at such other place as may be determined by the President, Vice-President and Stated Clerk of the General Synod, notice of which meeting shall be given to members of Synod at least three weeks previous to the time of such meeting, stating the particular business for which it is

called, not, however, excluding the transaction of such other business as the Synod may deem proper.

An explanation of this section is not necessary.

ARTICLE X.

OF CUSTOMS AND USAGES.

SEC. 1. The Sacrament of Baptism shall, if possible, be administered in the church, or some other place of public worship, at the time of public worship; and the form for Baptism shall in every case be retained. But it is recommended that no private baptism shall be administered without the presence of at least one Elder, who shall accompany the Minister for that purpose.

There are customs and usages that are peculiar to individual congregations and not binding on other churches. Wise is the minister who on taking charge of a congregation falls gracefully into conformity with its peculiar customs even if they are strange to him, or his prejudices are against them, instead of trampling them under foot or in any way showing contempt for them.

There are other customs and usages that are binding on all the churches and which are described in the Rules of Government.

The General Synod of 1814 adopted a report to the effect "that those customs and usages which were deemed necessary to be continued in the church are expressed in the explanatory articles of the constitution; such as singing the psalms and hymns approved of and recommended by General Synod; preaching from

the Heidelberg Catechism; observing the forms in the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, etc. as contained in our Liturgy, etc. That other customs and usages prevail in the church which are deemed non-essential and in many instances are either wholly dispensed with or partially retained in our congregations, according to the tastes or circumstances of pastors or people; such as the arrangements observed in the performance of public worship; the number of times singing psalms and hymns; reading sermons and preaching them from memory or extemporaneously; sprinkling in baptism one or three times; sitting or standing in receiving the Lord's supper; preaching on Ascension day, Good Friday, and other days which have long been observed both in Holland and America, etc. Your committee observes that those customs and usages which are deemed essential and constitutional, are preserved pure and entire by the different classes; and we observe likewise, that those which are considered non-essential are dispensed with, or retained and altered, according to the taste or circumstances of different ministers and congregations."

The propriety of the general rule that baptism whether of adults or infants should be administered in the church in presence of the congregation cannot be questioned; for it is the rite of introduction into a visible church, and it is desirable to have the prayers of the whole congregation. Its administration in chapel, school house, or wherever there is public worship is admissible.

When there is sickness of the adult candidate, or

parent or child, baptism may be privately administered. Formerly the presence of an elder was required; it is now recommended. It is desirable that an elder should be present as a representative of the consistory. Private baptism so far from being encouraged is virtually forbidden except in cases of necessity. Festive gatherings are entirely out of place in connection with the administration of this sacrament. Application for the baptism of an infant as well as of an adult was formerly made to the assembled elders. Ought not the ministers to be relieved from a responsibility that does not belong to them ?

Baptized non-communicants of orthodox belief and good character are not forbidden to present their children for baptism; but the practices of churches differ, some confining the privilege to members in full communion. Christian nurture is always promised, without which no gracious fruits are to be expected by parents from the baptism of their children. Where the mode is made a matter of conscience, baptism may be administered by immersion, for the form says "this the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us," etc.

SEC. 2. Every church shall observe such a mode in the administration of the Lord's Supper as shall be judged most conducive to edification; provided that the Form for the administration of the Lord's Supper shall be read, and a prayer suited to the occasion shall be offered, before the members participate in the ordinance.

SEC. 3. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall be administered at least twice a year, and it is recommended

that the same be administered once every two or three months.

In the administration of the Lord's supper, the reading of the form in the Liturgy is made imperative, also the offering of a suitable prayer before the administration. This prayer is found in connection with the form, although some ministers add a short prayer before the distribution of the elements.

Among questions that each church must determine for itself are the following:

1. Whether the supper shall be celebrated on the morning of the Lord's day and a sermon be preached or not.

The morning is usually to be preferred, and it is generally better not to omit the sermon but to make it short, and to judiciously abbreviate the other services. It may be concluded that the supper should be celebrated in the afternoon, to be a service by itself, and that the sermon should be omitted having been delivered in the morning.

2. Whether the posture shall be that of sitting or standing; hardly a question of the present.

In the days when all the communicants came forward in turn to the table, they sat in some churches, in others they stood. The old synods of the Netherlands allowed choice of these postures, but positively forbade kneeling as calculated to favor the doctrine of transubstantiation, and tempt to adoration of the sacrament. The question was hotly discussed in England in the time of Edward

VI. but it was decided to continue the practice of kneeling. Concerning it the following declaration was printed in the second prayer book of Edward: "Lest yet the same kneeling might be thought or taken otherwise, we do declare that it is not meant thereby that any adoration is done or ought to be done, either unto the sacramental bread and wine there bodily received, or to any real or essential presence there being of Christ's natural flesh and blood."

No church of our denomination would in view of the action of the early synods, of the practice during three hundred years, and of present Romeward tendencies be justified in introducing kneeling.

3. Whether tables should be used or not.

In view of the facts that our Lord partook of the supper with His disciples at the table; and that sitting with friends at a table symbolizes most vividly the idea of communion with Christ and with one another, it seems to be a pity that it has come to this, that when partaking of the Lord's supper, we know of no table but the little one from which the minister sends away the bread and the wine. It is pleasant to know that there is here and there a church that finds room at tables for the elders and some communicants, so that the picture of "sitting at meat" is not entirely lost.

4. Whether the elders or the deacons should carry the bread and wine to the communicants.

From time immemorial it has been the custom in our denomination for the deacons to perform this office. It properly belongs to them, for this is not a spiritual

but a purely mechanical function, and as such does not belong to the spiritual rulers. The minister *alone* administers this sacrament, and the deacons are used by him as a convenience, just as the members themselves are when they pass the elements from one to another. The elders should sit near the minister and receive the elements from his hands, and then distribution should be made by the deacons to the communicants in the pews. It is right that the serving should be done by the younger men, who are also the lower body of officials.

5. Whether the Lord's supper should be celebrated more frequently.

In apostolic times it was a part of the regular weekly service. In time, the doctrine was changed and the observance became less frequent, until the Church of Rome decided that yearly communion at Easter was sufficient. The Reformers favored frequency. Calvin advocated monthly communion. The French Reformed churches said that it should be observed more than four times a year. The National Synod of Dordrecht ordered that "the Lord's supper shall be celebrated every two months, if the same shall be convenient."

Every church should consider the question, whether its spiritual interests would not be promoted if the Lord's supper were more frequently observed than once in three months. Every congregation has liberty in the matter.

6. Whether private communions are allowable, and under what circumstances.

It is one thing for a minister to carry the elements in his pocket, always ready to administer them to the

slightly or even seriously sick; it is another for him, in company with a few Christian friends, to go to the sick, the aged and infirm, shut out from the house of God, likely never again to enter it, and solemnly to partake with them of the bread and the wine. Who would deny to God's dear children the help and comfort thus afforded? Let the supper be thus used, and not given as a *viaticum* or provision for one's last journey.

7. Whether bread should be leavened or unleavened; wine be fermented or unfermented; the nature of and time for preparatory services, etc.

SEC. 4. For the purpose of uniformity in the order of worship, the following is to be observed by all the Churches:

- 1st. Invocation.
- 2d. Salutation.
- 3d. Reading the Ten Commandments, or some other portions of Scripture, or both.
- 4th. Singing.
- 5th. Prayer.
- 6th. Singing.
- 7th. Sermon.
- 8th. Prayer.
- 9th. Collection of Alms.
- 10th. Singing.
- 11th. Benediction. The order of the afternoon and evening services shall be the same as the morning, excepting the reading of the Ten Commandments. The last service on the Lord's Day shall conclude with the Christian Doxology.

Under the explanatory articles before the constitution of 1833 was adopted, there was no prescribed order of

worship, although the same order was usually followed. Perhaps there was greater uniformity then than has been since.

In the Revised Liturgy which was approved by the classes and recommended for use in the churches by the General Synod in 1882 this order of worship is retained, that is, no part of it is omitted. A few things such as the responsive reading of the Psalter, recitation of the Apostles' Creed, singing of a Gloria, use of the Litany are in addition permitted to those who desire to use them, and a few rubrical directions are given. The order as we have it in this section is imperative, the things referred to are permissive.

In the Order, No. 9 is changed from "Collection of Alms" to "Offerings to the Lord," probably because all possible contributions to religious and benevolent objects come under the latter designation.

But in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands not only, but in this country until comparatively recent years, all the moneys collected at ordinary public worship on the Lord's day were religiously put into the deacon's fund for the relief of the poor. The collection was regarded as worship in that form.

It is difficult to see why the injunction to sing the doxology at the close of the evening service should be so generally neglected.

SEC. 5. No Psalms or Hymns may be publicly sung in the Reformed (Dutch) Churches, but such as are approved and recommended by the General Synod.

When this section was placed in the constitution the present legion of collections of hymns was unknown. Public worship included generally, two services on the Lord's day and one or two weekly meetings. The same book answered all purposes. Since that time hymn books have been made for Sunday schools, evangelistic meetings and for all sorts of societies. The synod has approved and endorsed very many, the chief ones among the last, being Hymns of the Church and Church Hymnary. Besides these are Christian Praise, Fulton Street Hymns, Hymns of Praise, etc. The rule should be strictly observed, as we believe that it is, in regard to the general services of the congregation that are held on the Lord's day.

Care, however, should be taken by pastors and consistories about the hymns used in Sunday schools and various gatherings. The songs sung by the young are as important as the laws passed by the elders.

SEC. 6. No catechisms shall be used in the Sabbath Schools of the Church but such as are approved and recommended by the General Synod.

A rule good in itself, but not as easy to carry into general effect as it is in itself good.

ARTICLE XI.

OF DISCIPLINE IN GENERAL.

SEC. 1. Discipline is the exercise of the authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to His Church. Its objects are the vindication of the honor of Christ,

the promotion of the purity and general edification of the Church, and the benefit of the offender.

Discipline is a term sometimes used in a wide sense meaning government in general. Hence a collection of rules of church government is called a "Book of Discipline." Christian churches being companies of people organized for certain purposes must not only have rules of government, but also authority to enforce them. He that resists the power in the church as well as in the state, resists the ordinance of God.

Discipline, in a more narrow sense, has to do with the treatment of offenders. Members who fall into transgression of a more or less scandalous nature are not to be left to themselves. They need correction, and God has given authority to churches to deal with them. Every denomination has its own courts and judges with spheres and prerogatives clearly defined. In ours, we have consistories, classes and synods. There is in this no system of ecclesiastical tyranny which an offending member when called to account should rebel against in assertion of his independence. When he made his confession of faith he promised to submit to this authority. Every minister on becoming such renews the promise. The constitution is the organic, fundamental law whereby every court is regulated and restricted in the exercise of discipline.

The objects of discipline are fourfold:

1. Vindication of the honor of Christ. Professing Christians are representatives of Christ in the world;

they claim to be His obedient servants and imitators; their departure from His law and example casts dishonor on Him in the eyes of the world. Therefore their evil courses must be disavowed and means be taken to induce them to amend their ways.

2. Promotion of the purity of the church. This is the chief element of a church's power in the world; not members, wealth, social position or activity. Its members are called unto holiness. Discipline has its part in maintaining this purity.

3. General edification. The building should, among its materials, have as little of wood, hay and stubble as may be, and as much of gold, silver and precious stones as possible. Hence the importance of salutary discipline.

4. The benefit of the offender. This is the immediate object of discipline and should never be lost sight of, as it so often and so easily is. It too often degenerates into a contest for victory. Parties are formed, feelings of enmity and revenge are aroused, evil speaking is indulged in, and churches are rent asunder. Discipline should never be exercised in such a spirit and manner that the subject of it shall have good reason to think that he is unjustly treated and persecuted. The authorities should never betray personal animosity, but make it manifest that they desire nothing so much as the good of the offender. They should be moved by feelings similar to those of a true father toward a wayward son, which are never more strong and tender than when he is compelled to deal severely with him. Even in ex-

communication one is delivered “unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Cor. 5:5.)

SEC. 2. Nothing shall be admitted as matter of accusation, or considered an offense, which cannot be shown to be such from Scripture, or the laws and regulations of the Church.

Of offenses that make a person liable to ecclesiastical discipline, two classes are mentioned:

I. Of those that can be shown to be such from Scripture.

Not all offenses are contrary to Scripture that some individual or individuals think to be such. Nor does an ecclesiastical decree make them so. Various bodies of Christians have made unwarranted terms of communion, and excluded from fellowship those who believed in the singing of uninspired hymns and use of organs in public worship; those who voted when God was not named in the national constitution; those who held slaves; those who would not pledge themselves to abstain from intoxicating liquors or tobacco; those whose amusements, dress and modes of living were deemed too worldly. All these have been made offenders demanding the exercise of discipline. Every fanatical devotee to some new reform, no matter what, is apt to insist that churches ought to recognize it in their terms of communion.

There are many things that can be shown to be opposed to the spirit or letter of Scripture that do not

call for ecclesiastical discipline. There are sins of omission and of commission that justify fraternal criticism and admonition, that are not to be brought before church courts.

But there are practical difficulties in the way of the application of this rule, occasioned by changes in the opinions of the Christian public. Increasing light has been thrown on the subject of Christian ethics. Acts and occupations are considered unchristian, disreputable and odious, that formerly either did not exist or were not regarded as opposed to true Christianity or inconsistent with its profession. Many things, not specified in Scripture in so many words, are yet so manifestly and notoriously contrary to it, that no church could with a good conscience tolerate them, or justify itself before the world in doing so.

Now, who is to determine whether an offense charged is not only one provable by Scripture, but one for which discipline is demanded? The man who brings an accusation may have no doubt about it. But his private judgment does not decide the question. The court before which the complaint is made must determine whether the offense charged is, in their view, one that it will be justified in investigating.

II. Of those that can be shown to be such from the laws and regulations of the church.

These laws and regulations are entirely separate from scriptural teachings or injunctions. They are indifferent in their nature, chiefly defining and prescribing methods of doing things; such as rules about elections

of elders and deacons, examinations and censures, administration of sacraments, etc. The constitution is chiefly made up of such matters which, indifferent in themselves, become important in view of the fact that they are items in a contract solemnly agreed to, and violations of which are serious enough to warrant the exercise of discipline.

SEC. 3. All baptized persons are members of the Church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline.

Concerning the authority of the church to exercise discipline on offenders who are members in full communion, there can be no question. Every communicant, on becoming such, acknowledged that authority and expressly promised to submit to it. Moreover the occasions and methods of discipline are carefully described.

But in regard to members by baptism only, the case is different. There are practical difficulties concerning authority; and also concerning the nature and limits of the discipline. Authority is naturally disputed by many on the ground that it rests entirely on an act done to them when they were unable to consent or protest. They do not consider that they might deny the authority of the state on the same ground. The word discipline is distasteful to them, bringing visions of citations, judicial processes, solemn and severe sentences, and they rebel against a tyrannical infringement on personal liberty.

But what view is the church to take ? What is she to do with those who decline to become members in full communion and perhaps turn away from all church ordinances ? If special obligations to them remain, how are they to be fulfilled ? It is suggested by some,

1. That they should be dealt with in the same way as offending communicants; that is, if they give no heed to admonitions, then cite them to appear, try them judicially, and cut them off so that thenceforth they are nothing more to the church than other sinners who have never been baptized. If this course were directed by Scripture as a means of their conversion we would follow it. But it is not, and it does not commend itself to our judgment. Probably many members of Christian families, or who are surrounded by certain social influences would become communicants rather than be disciplined after this manner, with proceedings recorded; and consequently the number of formal and graceless professors would be increased. Many others would treat such proceedings with contempt, turn away from the church and religion altogether, and become their avowed and bitter enemies.

2. That the church should regard them, as they do themselves, as released from her jurisdiction by their own voluntary course. Since they have failed to come at the proper time and make confession of their faith, it is claimed that the special relation no longer exists, and that the church is released from special responsibility to them.

But this position seems to be derogatory to our ordi-

nance of infant baptism and to the connected views about church care and nurture.

Is there a time limit to this care? If the baptized wish to be left to themselves, yet is it right and fair and Christlike for the church to consent to that wish and virtually to give them up as hopeless? Can a church do this with one of her children any more than a good mother could fail to pray and labor to the last for the reclamation of a wayward prodigal son, though he has gone far from his home, she knows not whither? So it remains

3. For the church to continue to recognize the relation and acknowledge her responsibility to the very end, while at the same time there is no call for such forms of discipline as are very proper in the case of offending communicants. They are denied certain privileges that belong to communicants, and this denial may be considered a sort of discipline. It is better that the church should do nothing further than continue to pray for them and to labor for their conversion, pressing with all fidelity and tenderness arguments from the associations of the past, embracing the influences of a Christian home, teachings of godly parents, etc.

The continuance in the church, of very worldly and abandoned characters, in their relation of baptized members works no harm to the church, for the world understands that they are not acting inconsistently with any profession.

ARTICLE XII.

OF OFFENSES.

SEC. 1. Private offenses are those that are known to an individual only, or at most to a very few.

SEC. 2. Such offenses are not immediately to be presented before a Church Judicatory, but the offender shall be dealt with according to the mode pointed out by our Lord in Matt. xviii. The same course shall be adopted in cases of personal or private injuries; but if, on due forbearance, these tender and Christian proceedings are unavailing, the whole matter shall be represented to the Judicatory, to which the offender is amenable.

SEC. 3. Informers who have not taken these previous steps shall be considered as guilty of an offense against the peace and order of the Church, and be censured accordingly.

If a disciplinable offense is known to only one person or to a very few, it is called a private offense and the course to be pursued is described in Matthew, ch. xviii. The knowledge of the offense is not to be communicated to any one, even as a secret, much less to be proclaimed in the streets, or brought at once to the notice of the judicatory of the church. He or they who have knowledge of the offense must first of all, without witnesses, call the attention of the offender to it. It is implied that the interview shall be conducted, not in a harsh and denunciatory manner, but in a Christian spirit, kindly and tenderly. If the offender confesses his fault frankly and penitently with promise of amendment, the matter must end there, and no reference ever be

made to it. If he deny or act defiantly, he must be seen again with witnesses, and an appeal to the church must be made only as the final resort after these private measures have failed.

A private offense may also be a personal one, that is, one may be injured in his person, property, business or family, and no one be aware of it beside the offender and the person injured. The same course is to be pursued by the injured person. If this rule of our Lord had always been observed in a Christian spirit, the world would never have known anything about many scandalous offenses, whose publicity has compelled action by church judicatories, and which have been attended by most disastrous, enduring results.

So much importance is attached to this rule that if any person who brings a charge before the elders is found to have neglected these previous steps, he must be censured for his unchristian neglect. He has not tried to win his erring brother. He has also offended against the peace and order of the church, by making that public which he should have labored to keep private.

This, however, does not relieve the original offender from prosecution for his offense. It may in some cases not be too late to avoid formal judicial process. If it is too late then the case must be prosecuted in accordance with constitutional directions.

SEC. 4. Public offenses are those that require the cognizance of a Church Judicatory; being so notorious

and scandalous that no private measures would obviate their injurious effects.

SEC. 5. When any person is charged with an offense, not by an individual, but by general rumor, the previous steps prescribed by our Lord in case of private offenses are not necessary, but the proper judicatory is bound to take immediate cognizance of the matter.

SEC. 6. To constitute a general rumor, or *fama clamosa*, it is necessary—

1st. That it specify some particular sin or sins.

2d. That it should have obtained general circulation.

3d. That it be not transient.

4th. That it shall be accompanied with strong presumption of its truth.

SEC. 7. The following are to be considered as the *principal offenses* that deserve the punishment of suspension or removal from office, viz: Heresy, Public Schisms, open Blasphemy, Simony, faithless Desertion of Office or intruding upon that of another, Slander, Lying, Perjury, Adultery, Fornication, Theft, Forgery, Acts of Violence, Drunkenness, scandalous Traffic; in short, all such sins and gross offenses as render the perpetrators infamous before the world, and which, in a private member of the church, would be considered as deserving excommunication.

Two elements of a public offense of which a church must take cognizance are here mentioned, viz: its notoriety and its scandalous character. An offense that is scandalous in itself may be a private one, and private steps may accomplish everything that a judicial process could effect. But notoriety alters the case entirely. The attention of the judicatory must be called to the case in which these two elements are found. The con-

sciousness that no private measures could obviate the injurious effects settles the question about the duty of the elders of the church.

An offense may have publicity, and yet not be of a very scandalous nature. It may be little, if anything, more than an imprudence. Often the injurious effects may be prevented or removed by a prudent course on the part of the elders without instituting judicial proceedings. It is a good rule never to institute such proceedings if they can be dispensed with. They are not the wisest ministers and elders, nor the most faithful disciplinarians, who are never more happy than when they sit as judges and have an offender before them on trial.

In every case of *fama clamosa* or accusation by general rumor, the elders are to consider carefully whether the four things that are necessary to constitute such rumor exist. Rumor may charge a general delinquency without specifying a particular sin or sins; it may be of very limited extent; it may die away in a very short time; a little enquiry may reveal the fact that it has no probable basis of truth. It is well to make haste slowly.

Those who hold office in the church, whatever the office may be, must be suspended or removed from office when found guilty of any of the offenses enumerated in section 7. The list, however, is not complete, for it is added: "in short, all such sins and gross offenses as render the perpetrators infamous before the world, and which in a private member of the church

would be considered as deserving excommunication.” In connection with suspension or removal from office, it is competent for the court also to suspend the offender from the Lord’s supper. Both these are usually included in the same sentence. A minister is sometimes restored to the privilege of communing when it is not deemed wise to restore him to office.

SEC. 8. In admitting accusations against a Minister or Elder, the rule prescribed in 1 Tim. v. 19, shall always be observed, and accusers must come forward openly to support the charge.

SEC. 9. If Ministers of the Word have committed any public, gross sin, which would render their appearance in the pulpit under such circumstances highly offensive, it shall be the duty of the Consistory, in order to prevent scandal, to close the pulpit against such criminal, and refer him to be tried by the Classis as soon as possible. The proceedings of the Consistory in such cases are at their peril, and are not to be considered as a trial, but only a prudent interference, and binding over the accused to the judgment of his peers.

The rule found in 1 Tim. v. 19 is as follows: “Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses.” A law of Moses to this effect was applicable to all cases and not to those of officials only. (Deut. xix. 15.) This law is for the protection of the spiritual rulers in the church, who, from their conspicuous position, are specially exposed to the false and malicious charges of the enemies of truth and righteous-

ness. Yet it is not intended to shield offenders in office and to secure for them immunity from punishment as the following sections show.

The case is supposed of a minister who is publicly charged with having committed some gross sin, the proofs of which are apparently so strong that his appearance in the pulpit would be highly offensive. He cannot be tried by the consistory for they have not authority; the classis cannot be summoned on the instant. It is made the duty of the consistory, as a prudential measure, to close the pulpit against him, and he is to be notified not to enter it. Few would refuse to heed this prohibition. If one should, the consistory is authorized to debar him by force, calling, if necessary, to their aid the officers of the law.

The next step is to make the matter in all its details known to the classis at once through its president, so that it may be investigated and the offender be tried.

The action of the consistory is not a trial, but it is analogous to the work of a grand jury, which, on *ex parte* evidencé, declares that there is sufficient ground to find an indictment and to put the accused on trial. They do this at their peril, that is, they take the responsibility, realizing the seriousness of it, and understanding the situation in which they will be placed, if it shall appear that their action was unnecessary. At the same time it is conceivable that the man may be acquitted and yet that the circumstances were such at the time of their action as to justify them in it.

SEC. 10. In case of like offenses by an Elder or Deacon, the Consistory shall immediately proceed to his trial, and, upon conviction, he shall be forthwith suspended from his office, and excluded from the privileges of the Church.

SEC. 11. If any member of the Church shall be duly convicted of an infamous crime by any civil court, he shall, *ipso facto*, be suspended from any ecclesiastical office with which he may be invested, and excluded from the privileges of the church, until he shall have established his innocence, or manifested his repentance to the ecclesiastical judicatory to which he is amenable.

An elder or deacon charged with a like offense or offenses, being amenable to the spiritual consistory of elders, must be brought to trial by them immediately. If convicted he must be suspended from his office and from church privileges.

It is very proper that a church member who has been convicted of an infamous crime by a civil court should be *ipso facto* or without trial by the ecclesiastical judicatory suspended by the latter from any office that he may hold, and also be excluded from the privileges of the church. This respect is due to public opinion and to the dignity and authority of civil courts, and to jealousy for the purity of the church also.

But though convicted, the man may be innocent. If he claims that he is innocent, and that he is desirous to show his innocence, it is his right to have a fair opportunity given him to prove it. This, the church judicatory should grant, and if he satisfies them that he was unjustly condemned, his suspension must be removed

and he be restored. His failure to seek vindication is to be regarded as a confession of guilt. Then his restoration will depend on his profession of repentance and credible evidence of its genuineness.

ARTICLE XIII.

OF PROCESS AND TRIAL.

SEC. 1. Offenses may be brought before a Judicatory by individual accusation or common fame. In the former case, the process must be in the name of the accuser or accusers. In the latter no person need be named as the accuser.

There are many reasons for avoiding judicial trials, if it be possible, and for exhausting all means of dealing otherwise with offenders. But if this be not possible, then it is very important to proceed rightly, making no mistake at the beginning. A mistake in proceedings at the start may cause one to be cast on an appeal to a higher court and compel him to begin anew.

If a charge be brought by an individual, he must be named as the accuser, see to the formulation of charges, provide witnesses and prosecute the case in his own name. It is his case throughout all the courts to which it may be carried by appeal.

The great majority of cases are not brought by individuals but by common fame. Individuals are loth to become accusers unless they have personal grievances. An elder in answer to the question proposed to him just before the Lord's supper reports, that a rumor is in circulation about some member that ought to be inves-

tigated. A fellow elder may be able to explain the rumor satisfactorily, and therefore nothing further is to be done. If it is determined that an investigation should be made, the first step is the appointment of a committee to make enquiries, to confer with the accused person, and to obtain an explanation or confession with a view of avoiding prosecution if possible. If the charge is denied, or it is too doubtful and serious to be passed without investigation, a committee should be appointed to formulate charges and ascertain what sort of testimony can be procured. A great difficulty in ecclesiastical trials proceeds from the fact that witnesses often refuse to testify, and there is no authority to compel them to do so. Often those who are most loud and persistent in censures of a consistory for not disciplining some one, are the most ready to refuse to bear testimony. This committee should either prepare the case for trial or report that it will not be wise to proceed to trial, because of the nature of the charge or some defect in the testimony. It is not well for a consistory to prosecute unless there is probability of a conviction.

SEC. 2. In exhibiting charges, the time, place, and circumstances shall be accurately stated in writing, that the accused may be enabled the better to defend himself.

SEC. 3. Great caution is to be exercised in receiving accusations where there is good reason to believe that they are preferred through passion or improper and unchristian motive; or where the accuser is under censure or not of good character, or has the prospect of temporal advantage.

An accused person ought to have the amplest opportunity to defend himself against an accusation. He might not be able to defend himself against a general charge of drunkenness, though he might be able to prove that he was sober at a specified place and time; nor could he on such general charge prove an alibi. The accuracy of statement required allows some degree of approximation. Witnesses do not always have at the time of an occurrence, facilities for learning the time to a minute. They sometimes say in giving testimony, "at or near" a certain hour, or "between two mentioned hours." One occurrence may be linked with another, and so time and place be determined.

In ecclesiastical affairs as well as civil, accusations are often brought by individuals from very unchristian motives. In fact, very few persons will invoke the discipline of the church in behalf of a neighbor, from pure love for his soul and jealousy for the honor of Christ. It is proper, therefore, that suspicious motives mentioned in this section should be taken into consideration. The consistory as a grand jury determining whether an indictment shall be made, looks at every thing bearing on the question. But it must not be concluded that the strongest proof of the existence of improper motives on the part of an accuser is to prevent a judicatory from prosecuting charges when there seems to be good ground for them. If so, there would be few prosecutions by individual accusers, Caution is to be exercised.

SEC. 4. All citations shall be issued and signed by the President or Clerk, who shall also furnish citations for such witnesses as may be required on either side.

SEC. 5. A copy of the accusation shall be furnished to the accused at the time when the citation is served; which citation shall designate the time when, and place where, the accused shall put in his answer. Not less than ten days shall be allowed to intervene between the time when the citation is served and the answer received; and no shorter period shall be allowed between receiving the answer of the accused and the trial of the case, unless by consent of all the parties interested.

All citations are issued by the court and are signed by either the president or clerk or both. A citation for an accused person to appear and answer to charges is sent to him directly by the court.

Citations for their witnesses are furnished to both prosecutor and defendant respectively, and they summon whom they please, but the court does not serve them to the witnesses. If the court be the prosecutor in *fama clamosa* proceedings, it then serves citations to its own witnesses.

It is wise to make the intervening time between the citation and the answer more than ten days, so as to provide for any contingencies that may occur and to guard against complaint. The documents should be delivered by a messenger in person, who will be able to testify that they have been received.

SEC. 6. When the accused refuses to obey the citation, he shall be cited a second time, which second citation

shall always be accompanied by a notice, that, if he still refuses to appear at the time and place appointed, he shall not only be liable to censure for contumacy, but that the Judicatory will proceed to the trial and decision of his case as if he were present.

A second refusal to obey a citation subjects the accused person, very properly, to censure which should always be inflicted. In addition to this, the court, according to notice given, proceeds to the trial of his case though he be absent, and to decide it just as if he were present.

It is objected to this procedure that it is not analagous to the methods of ordinary courts, for even criminal courts do not put a man on trial unless he is present. But it must be noticed that the cases are very far from being analagous. A criminal court can, and does compel the presence of an accused person when it can lay its hands on him. He is not summoned to, but actually brought into court. But the ecclesiastical judicatory might summon one a hundred times, and he stand even in their presence, who might yet decline to appear and answer as defendant.

Now what would be the result if the rule must always be adhered to, that no man shall be tried for any offense unless he be present? If one who is guilty of an infamous crime wishes to escape trial and conviction, he need do nothing but throw his citations into the waste basket. It is possible that one accused may be an innocent man, yet through a misunderstanding about jurisdiction or for some other reason, he might

refuse to obey his citation. Ought not he nevertheless, to be vindicated by a trial, and the church also?

There are those who have thought that a happy relief from vexatious proceedings is found in this censure for contumacy. They have congratulated themselves on the non-appearance of the person cited, for now, without molestation, they can censure him for disrespect to them. Meanwhile they can afford to wait for some future time for the reappearance of the chief actor, when they will proceed to trial on the original charges, a day they never expect to see. But it is forgotten that the direction of our section is very explicit, which is to make the censure for contumacy only a step in the proceedings. This censure is not a suspension, so that no further punishment could at the time be inflicted. It is a rebuke for disrespect to the court and nothing more.

We could accept almost any interpretation of this section rather than believe that it may be so perverted as to effectually prevent offenses from being investigated, offenders tried, and justice satisfied.

SEC. 7. In cases where it is demanded by either party, a commission of the Judicatory may be appointed by it to take testimony at a distance; of which commission, and of the time and place of their meeting, due notice shall be given to all the parties.

An important provision. Before it was placed in the constitution, cases occurred that could not be prosecuted, because there was no authority to take testimony in a distant part of the country.

SEC. 8. To establish an accusation against any member of the Church, the testimony of more than one witness is required. The witnesses, after being sworn or duly affirmed, shall be examined in the presence of the accused, and he shall be permitted to cross-examine them. Yet, if two or more witnesses bear testimony each to different acts of the same general nature, this, if not disproved, shall be considered sufficient to establish the accusation. The evidence shall be faithfully minuted and subscribed by the witnesses, and in this final form, with the sentence or decision, be entered on the records; and the parties shall be allowed copies of the same, at their own expense, if desired.

This section implies the presence of the accused, for otherwise the witnesses could not be examined in his presence, nor could he cross-examine them.

Two witnesses testifying to two acts of the same nature are regarded as proving a general charge. If one testifies that the accused was intoxicated in a certain place at a specified time, and another that he was in the same condition in another place at another specified time, it is sufficient to sustain the charge. But the accusation must then be put in general form with the specifications clearly stated under it.

Care must be paid to the minuting, subscribing and recording of testimony. An important case was at one time referred back to the original court because the substance and not the very words of the testimony had been recorded.

SEC. 9. No accusation shall be admitted unless brought forward by the accuser within the space of two

years after the crime shall be alleged to have been committed; excepting that it shall appear that unavoidable impediments prevented the bringing an accusation sooner, and at the trial the accuser shall not sit in judgment upon the case.

If a member of the court, whether minister or elder, be the accuser, he cannot sit as judge.

The limitation of time during which an accusation may be brought is wise and important, for otherwise a man would always be liable to have something brought up against him from the remote past, after witnesses who could have helped him had died. No alibi could be proved, and it would be impossible to clear himself from a false charge. Yet the exception is also wise and important, since facts before unknown may have come to light, either to prove some charge or to implicate some new man, or to work a vindication. Clouds may thus be removed from some, while others are brought to justice.

In all such cases a court needs great discretion lest personal malevolence be allowed to use the discipline of the church to do its work against the innocent.

SEC. 10. No professional counsel shall be permitted to appear and plead in cases of process in any of the ecclesiastical courts; but, in the trial of any case before a Consistory, a member of the Classis may be employed to prepare and conduct the case on either side. And, in the higher courts, if any accused person feel unable to represent and plead his own case to advan-

tage, he may request, or the President may appoint, any Minister or Elder belonging to the judicatory before which he appears to prepare and conduct his case as he may judge proper. But the Minister or Elder so engaged shall not be allowed, after pleading the case of the accused, to sit in judgment as a member of the judicatory.

The time has been when parties were allowed to employ professional counsel in ecclesiastical courts. Some Scotch lawyers won their most highly prized laurels in cases tried before the General Assembly.

The practice is forbidden in our ecclesiastical courts because the liability to proceedings, scenes and language unbecoming in courts of the Lord Jesus Christ is too great. Nevertheless, legal help is allowed in the various courts from the consistory up, in the way described in this section. The General Synod has frequently appointed one of its members, who was also a lawyer, to aid an appellant in prosecuting his appeal. There have been cases in which the lawyer so appointed had been the helper of the accused in the lower courts, and who had obtained a seat in the synod with a special view to a continuance of aid to him who might be called his client. No one found fault with this; for this service did not prevent said elder from attending to the ordinary business of the synod. There has always been in our courts great readiness to give parties, in such circumstances, every facility for a fair prosecution of their appeals, and for enjoying every advantage that could rightfully be afforded them.

SEC. 11. Such as obstinately reject the admonitions of the Consistory, or have been found guilty of the commission of an otherwise gross offense, shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper, which act of suspension may be published at the discretion of the Consistory; and, being suspended and repeatedly admonished without discovering marks of repentance, the Church shall then proceed to the last remedy, namely, Excommunication; agreeably to the adopted form, and conformably to the Word of God. But no person shall be excommunicated without the previous approval of the Classis.

The first step in discipline generally is admonition. This if not heeded, must be repeated again and again; and if these repetitions are without effect, they must be followed by suspension from the Lord's supper.

If the offense is so gross that admonition will not answer, then suspension must be the first act. This must be followed by admonitions, the object of discipline being the repentance and restoration of the offender. Admonitions must be repeated as often as shall be deemed expedient. A church fails in its duty to a suspended member which ceases to pay attention to him, treating him as virtually an excommunicated member. Churches rarely proceed further in discipline than to suspension. Perhaps that is the better way unless the case be a peculiarly gross and aggravated one.

SEC. 12. Before the Church proceeds to excommunication, the obstinacy of the offender shall be publicly notified to the congregation, declaring his offenses, to-

gether with the particular care and attention bestowed on him, by admonition, suspension from the Lord's table, and by repeated remonstrances. This procedure shall be comprised in three several steps. In the first instance, the name of the offender shall not be mentioned, that he may in some measure be spared. In the second, with the advice of Classis, his name shall be expressed. In the third, the congregation shall be informed, that, unless he repenteth, he will be excluded from the communion of the Church; so that, if he remain obstinate, his excommunication may take place with their tacit approbation. The interval between these notifications shall be at the discretion of the Consistory.

The last step in discipline is excommunication, which can be taken only after repeated admonitions without signs of repentance. In every case the previous approval of the classis must be obtained. The following order must be followed:

1. The case is explained to the congregation without mentioning the name of the offender.
2. The name is with the advice of the classis expressed.
3. Notice is given that the offender shall be excluded if he refuse to repent.
4. The act is performed with the use of the prescribed form.

SEC. 13. When an excommunicated person becomes penitent, and is desirous of being again reconciled to the Church, such desire shall be publicly declared to the congregation, either before the administration of the

Lord's Supper, or at some other seasonable opportunity; that, if no objections are offered, he may, on declaring his repentance, be publicly readmitted to a participation of the Lord's Supper, agreeably to the form appointed for that purpose.

Excommunication, like all the other acts of discipline, is for the benefit of the offender. The church authorities seek his salvation and not his destruction. They pray and hope for his repentance and they are full of joy when he professes and gives proofs of repentance, and he seeks reconciliation with the church, and his readmission is accompanied with devout thanksgiving.

ARTICLE XIV.

OF APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS.

SEC. 1. Any member of the Church, conceiving himself to be personally aggrieved or injured by the decision of a Judicatory, may appeal therefrom to the next higher Judicatory. Also, a Consistory or Classis considering itself aggrieved by the judgment or censure of a higher Judicatory, enjoys the same right of appeal.

SEC. 2. Any one intending to appeal from an act or decision of a Judicatory, must at the time of the action, or within ten days thereafter, give notice of such intention to the President of the body from whose action he intends to appeal. Within ten days after such notice he shall send to said President in writing the appeal, with the reasons thereof. On default of this the appeal falls.

The right of appeal to a higher judicatory belongs to every member of the church who feels personally ag-

grieved by the act (sec. 2) or decision of a lower judicatory. Cases of this kind usually spring out of judicial proceedings. A member of a church has been tried by the consistory and found guilty of a serious offense. He may think that he has not been fairly tried, that there have been obvious irregularities in the proceedings, or that the finding is not according to the evidence. He has a right to seek a remedy by an appeal to the classis, and if necessary from its decision to the higher courts. He appeals because he feels *personally* aggrieved. The minister convicted by a classis has the same right of appeal to the Particular Synod and thence to the General Synod. A consistory which considers itself aggrieved by some act of the classis may appeal to the Particular Synod, and a classis may appeal from the Particular to the General Synod. Where there is in the case of an individual no *personal* grievance, there can be no appeal. He may dissent strongly from some act of the body of which he is a member, but if it does not affect him personally he cannot appeal. There are other ways for him to attempt to rectify what seems to him to be wrong.

The right of appeal is not confined to judicial cases. An ecclesiastical body might pass an act or adopt a measure that a person feels to be personally injurious to him, and he may appeal. Similarly a lower judicatory may appeal.

If a person who is aggrieved by a decision intends to appeal from it, he may give notice of said intention at the time of the action. Before the expiration of the

ten following days he must send his appeal and the reasons for it to the president of the judicatory from whose decision he appeals. If he neglects to do this, he loses his opportunity.

Instead of giving notice at the time, he may send it to the president of the judicatory before the expiration of ten days after its action. He will then be allowed ten more days to prepare his appeal and reasons and send them to said president. He will also have time to reconsider and perhaps change his mind, and determine not to appeal.

SEC. 3. An appeal made by a Judicatory must be made by it as such regularly convened, and the appeal, with the reasons thereof, must be sent in writing to the President of the body appealed from, within twenty days of the action from which the appeal is taken. On default of this, the appeal falls.

SEC. 4. If an appellant gives notice and satisfactory reasons to the President of the Judicatory to which the appeal is made, that he cannot attend at the next stated meeting of that body, his appeal shall lie over to the next following stated meeting. But if he fail to appear, and prosecute his appeal without such notice and reasons, it is to be considered as relinquished.

No commissioner from, nor member of a judicatory aggrieved by the action of a higher body, who is present when such action is taken, has a right to give notice of the intention of the judicatory to appeal. A resolution to that effect must be adopted by the judicatory itself

regularly convened. Twenty days are allowed for it to convene, to prepare its appeal and reasons, and to make all the arrangements necessary for the prosecution of the appeal.

An appellant may find that it will be impossible or very inconvenient for him to be present at the next stated meeting of the judicatory to which he has appealed. He is thereupon accommodated with a postponement; *provided*, that he has given notice to the president, accompanied with reasons for his absence, satisfactory to the judicatory. These reasons should be imperative; they should be closely searched into to ascertain whether there be not a device to secure delay; besides, the court appealed from should not for light reasons be put to the trouble of preparing and sending its documents and commissioner.

This concession to the appellant is also of doubtful necessity, for he might request the judicatory to appoint one of its number to conduct his case in his absence, which request would readily be complied with. (Art. xiii. sec. 10.)

SEC. 5. It shall be the duty of every Judicatory that has tried a case originally or by appeal, in recording its decision, to set forth at length the reasons thereof, that the record may exhibit, as far as practicable, everything that had an influence on its judgment.

SEC. 6. It shall be the duty of any Judicatory from whose act or decision an appeal is made, to transmit a certified copy of the action appealed from, signed by the President, and countersigned by the Clerk, together

with the appeal and reasons accompanying the same, to the Judicatory appealed to, at the next regular meeting thereof, and the papers thus transmitted shall be considered the documents in the case.

The requirements of these sections are of the utmost importance. The judicatories appealed to are courts of review, which cannot admit any testimony besides that which was given before the court of original jurisdiction. If new testimony of sufficient importance has come to light, the case may be remanded to the original court for a new trial. The records therefore of the testimony before the original court, and of the decisions, reasons, etc., of appellate courts cannot be too full and complete.

Very properly, a judicatory from whose decision an appeal is taken is required to send a certified copy of its action, of the appeal and reasons to the body appealed to, so that it may have all the documents bearing on the case.

Instead of simply producing the book of minutes it is better to have a fair copy of the testimony made and certified to, with the other documents, so that if there be a further appeal these may be taken together to the higher court.

SEC. 7. An inferior Judicatory shall be permitted to send a commissioner to the one appealed to, for the purpose of making explanations relative to the case; it being expressly understood, that the original parties in the case shall have the same right of being heard in every stage of the trial, from one court to another.

The judicatory from whose decision an appeal is taken, is allowed, not required, to send a commissioner to the higher court which is to try the appeal. The sole object of his mission is to make "explanations relative to the case," presumably, thus to aid the appellate court. He is not a prosecutor, defendant, advocate or party in any sense. It has been customary to allow him to traverse the whole case, to argue it on its merits, to appear in the role of an advocate as against the appellant, who has not always escaped remarks from him derogatory to his character. The expediency and justice of allowing this liberty are to say the least, doubtful. It is not consistent with fairness to the appellant who may be quite as much in danger from the skill and eloquence, not to say, denunciations of a commissioner as from a calm, judicial review of the evidence in the case. It is believed that the cause of truth and righteousness would not suffer if the courts should abandon the custom of sending commissioners to the appellate courts in cases of appeal, or if these should be strictly confined to their legitimate function of making explanations when needed, that is, when asked for.

There are two features in our methods of discipline that lead to some confusion and embarrassment. One is the necessity of making courts also prosecutors in cases of *fama clamosa*; the other the appearance of commissioners from the lower courts. Our ministers who have had much experience of general synods will call to mind many a case of appeal in which hours were

spent in trying to determine who were the parties in the case. There is only one way out of the difficulty. It is by taking and holding firmly the position that there are no parties at all, except the *original parties* with whom the case originated. They continue to be parties, and the *only* parties until the final issue by the decision of the final court of appeal. An appellate court can never become a party. Its function is to decide between two parties, not to ally itself with, or become a substitute for either. Having made its decision, it has not as a court any farther interest in the case. It has nothing to defend. If it sends a commissioner to the higher court, it is only for the benefit of that court, not for its own vindication or defense. It is completely and forever out of the field.

There are practical difficulties enough in our system that seem to be unavoidable, without bringing an array of parties into the field appealing and defending, and thus confusing and embarrassing.

A consistory in a case of *fama clamosa* appears in a threefold capacity. A damaging rumor is brought to the elders concerning a member of the church. In the first place, they act as a grand inquest to ascertain whether there is ground for indictment. In the second place, they become prosecutor, appointing usually one of their number to prepare and conduct the case. In the third place, they sit as a court to try the accused.

If the accused be found guilty and he appeals to the classis what is to be done? Who are to appear as parties before the classis? The appellant or convicted

man of course is one; the consistory, not as a court, but in the role of prosecutor, is the other. Thus we have the two parties of consistory and appellant, and these continue to be the only ones, through all the courts to the end if there be successive appeals. The classis and Particular synods never come in as such, and their commissioners are simply explainers. The matter is more simple where there is an individual prosecutor. A. prosecutes B. and B. appeals. A. and B. are the only parties before classis, the Particular Synod, and the General Synod, just as they were at the first before the consistory.

In the administration of justice in the community there is a grand jury selected from the citizens to consider charges and find indictments; there is a prosecutor of the pleas who prepares charges and conducts the prosecution; there is a court to try the evil doer; and there is a jury to decide on the evidence and convict or acquit accordingly. Different persons are allotted to the different parts of the work. We in the church alas! are not so happy.

SEC. 8. For all cases that have originated in the Consistory, the Particular Synod shall be the Final Court of Appeal, except when as many members of the Particular Synod, as there are Classes connected with the Synod shall, within ten days of its adjournment, declare in writing to the President that the case adjudicated is a proper one for appeal to the General Synod. In such case an appeal, if constitutionally made, shall be entertained by the General Synod.

SEC. 9. In order to prevent vexation and delay in the judicial proceedings of any ecclesiastical assembly by means of successive appeals in the progress of any trial or investigation, the party who may consider himself aggrieved by any decision, upon any incidental question which may arise before a final sentence is pronounced, may state his objections to such decision, and require to have the same noted in the minutes of the proceedings, to the end that he may avail himself thereof on an appeal from the final sentence, without arresting the progress of such investigation or trial. And in such cases every decision objected to, as well as the objections, shall be distinctly stated in the minutes of such assembly, and sent up with the appeal to the appellate Judicatory for review.

SEC. 10. Individuals who have voted in a lower court upon a case which is carried up by appeal, or who have prepared and conducted such case, shall not be at liberty to vote upon the trial of the appeal in the higher courts.

The provision in section 8 was not contained in our former constitutions. The General Synod has been thereby greatly relieved, and that without injustice to any one. Many ministers remember how in former years, much of the time of the General Synod was occupied with trying appeals in petty, local cases originating in consistories. For all such cases the Particular Synod is now the court of final resort; excepting those in which the condition mentioned in this section exists. The ten members referred to, need not belong to as many different classes.

Section 9 also affords great relief by preventing many

appeals from decisions of questions relating to subordinate issues, as admission or rejection of testimony, steps in proceedings, technicalities, etc. Either party if aggrieved by such decision may have his objection recorded in the minutes and also the decision objected to. These will thus come before the court of review and be considered by it; meanwhile the progress of the investigation will not be impeded.

SEC. 11. If a minority or any member of a minority of any inferior Church Judicatory shall consider any subordinate decision or any part of the formal proceedings to have been so erroneous, as injuriously to affect the interests of truth or of vital godliness, they may present the same by way of complaint to the next higher Judicatory for its examination and decision.

SEC. 12. This complaint, if entertained, brings the whole record of the case under the review of the superior Judicatory.

SEC. 13. No such complaint shall be entertained except after notice given to the President of the body complained of, and the sending of the complaint, and reasons for it, as prescribed in cases of appeal.

A complaint differs from an appeal in that complainants are not moved by a personal grievance. The right of complaint is the right of a minority of one or more who deem an act of the majority to be contrary to the rules of the church as contained in its constitution, or as in any way "injuriously to affect the interests of truth or of vital godliness." The act seems to them so erroneous and injurious that it ought not to be allowed

to pass unnoticed, and to stand as a precedent unrebuked, or at least unchallenged.

Complaints are sometimes made of some subordinate decisions in cases of appeal which the parties themselves do not notice because they do not have damaging effects on the prospects of either of them touching the issue. But others looking from a different point of view regard them as serious enough in their general bearing to justify them in calling the attention of a higher court to them. In considering such complaint, the whole record of the case comes under review.

The same rules as to procedure, of notices, limitation of time, documents, etc., are to be observed as in cases of appeal.

ARTICLE XV.

OF RULES AND AMENDMENTS.

SEC. 1. The General Synod shall have power to make all such rules and regulations as may be necessary for carrying the foregoing articles into execution, except where provision is thereby made for that purpose.

SEC. 2. No alteration shall ever be made to the foregoing articles, but by previous recommendation from the General Synod to the respective Classes, and the consent of a majority of the same to such proposed alteration, together with the final declarative resolution of the General Synod for the time being; and the articles as thus determined and declared shall be and are the authoritative and only Constitution of the Reformed Church in America.

The rules of government of all churches, often need

changes and amendments because of changed times and circumstances. Two extremes are to be avoided. One is that of an unyielding attachment to rules that have survived their usefulness; the other that of a readiness to make changes on every occasion of personal inconvenience caused by the operation of some rule. Safety requires that changes, especially in the organic law of a church, should be carefully guarded against undue haste.

In the present article the method of making amendments to our rules of government is described:

First of all, an amendment must be proposed to the General Synod. This may be done by means of an overture from a lower body, or by a resolution submitted by a member of the synod.

Secondly, it must receive the favorable judgment of the synod, so that it may be recommended by it to the classes. It is important to distinguish between a recommendation and a reference of an amendment. The latter is an unjustifiable device to save time, trouble and responsibility. It would be very unfortunate if the Synod were allowed to vex the church at large by sending down to the classes all the proposed amendments that find their way to the synod. The General Synod must take time to consider, debate, weigh arguments and objections, so as to form an intelligent judgment. No proposed amendment should be allowed to go to the classes that the synod does not wish to see adopted.

Thirdly, the synod must send the amendment with its recommendation to the classes for their approval. The

votes of the classes must be reported to the next General Synod, counted by it, and the result announced. If a majority of the classes, not only of those voting but of the whole number, shall appear to have disapproved of the amendment, it is lost. The synod can do nothing further about it.

Fourthly, a resolution of the synod declaring that the amendment is thenceforth part of the constitution.

Now the question arises whether the General Synod is obliged to pass a declarative resolution on learning that a majority of the classes have consented to the proposed amendment, or whether that body may for reasons that seem to it to be good and satisfactory decline to pass it.

The language of the rule taken by itself does not compel the former view. The consent of the classes is according to it a *sine qua non*. It virtually forbids a declarative resolution when the classes have not consented. But there is no express requirement of a declarative resolution when the classes have consented.

Yet the fact is to be admitted that the rule, as it stands at present, has been changed from that which was originally formed at the conclusion of the explanatory articles in 1792, and also at the conclusion of the constitution of 1833. This raises the question why the rule was changed by eliminating the words "final determination and resolution of the General Synod for the time being," and substituting "final declarative resolution of the General Synod for the time being."

It is claimed that this change was made for the pur-

pose of taking away all liberty from the synod in the matter, and to oblige it to ratify the favorable decision of the classes without questioning. This may be so, but what a pity that the rule has not been so expressed that no question could be raised on this point! If this be the legitimate working of the rule, there are not a few who think that there is an imperative call for an amendment to this article concerning amendments.

It is assumed that all are agreed that no amendment should be made to the rules of government unless it promises to be for the best interests of the denomination and is agreeable to its mind. How shall that mind be ascertained as fully as practicable, is the essential question. Is it possible to ascertain this by a majority vote of the classes? A man need not be much of an arithmetician to satisfy himself that a majority vote of the classes is quite likely to represent a small minority of the membership of the churches. A classis composed of ten members representing five hundred communicants, counts for as much as one composed of sixty members representing three thousand communicants. In view of this, what is a majority vote of the classes worth? If the synod must obey it, we have as weak an element in our policy as can be imagined.

We can safely confine the synod to a declarative resolution only when its action is conditioned on reports in detail of the votes of the members of the respective classes, and it is the majority of the aggregate vote of those members and not of the classes *as such* that is to determine the question.

There may be some who have exalted ideas of classical prerogative. They look upon the classes as fountains of authority; as creators and repairers of constitutions; as separated from all the other bodies in the denomination by some peculiar and divine right. It may be believed by some that the submission of proposed amendments to the classes is a practical acknowledgment of their sacred right and peculiar authority; and that if we doubt the inherent supreme right of a classis in constitution-making and mending, we question a fundamental principle of Presbyterianial government. It is enough to say here that such views do not belong to Dutch Presbyterianism. The fathers both in the Netherlands and in America knew nothing of them, and we will not do wisely if we adopt them.

It is interesting to know that when the time was ripe for the American Dutch churches to assert their ecclesiastical independence and form a constitution for themselves, the General Synod initiated and carried on the work to completion. But after some preliminaries had been attended to, the following minute was adopted:

“The Rev. Synod having deliberated upon this report, resolved that the committee be requested to frame a draft of church government and discipline, agreeably to the principles stated in the report, and lay an accurate copy, if practicable, before the Rev. Synod at their next meeting. In order, however, also to secure the counsel and assistance of all their members in this weighty matter, it is likewise ordained that the president of this synod communicate to each of the respec-

tive classes the request of this synod, that each and every minister with an elder (besides those who are appointed by the Rev. Classes as delegates to synod), please to appear at the meeting in New York, on the first Wednesday in the ensuing October, so that the synod may be able to avail themselves of the presence and counsel of the whole body of ministers and elders in issuing their ecclesiastical constitution, as also in relation to the professorship and other weighty matters."

It thus appears that the fathers of that day, were not concerned about the majority vote of the five classes then existing. But they were desirous of obtaining the judgment and vote of every Reformed Dutch minister and of an elder from every Reformed Dutch congregation. Many accepted the invitation; they were present at the meeting in October and their names are recorded in the minutes along with the appointed delegates.

It cannot be doubted that when they adopted their rules for the amendment of the explanatory articles they adopted what seemed to them the best practicable way of learning the mind of the churches, leaving at the same time something to the discretion and authority of the General Synod.

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